The Shadow Witch

By

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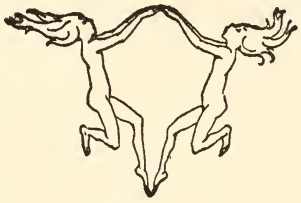
THE SHADOW WITCH

Uniform with this Volume

PRINCESS
WHITE-FLAME

By
GERTRUDE CROWNFIELD
Illustrated by
ANNE MERRIMAN PECK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY



THE SHADOW WITCH

BY

GERTRUDE CROWNFIELD

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ANNE MERRIMAN PECK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

NEW YORK

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TO THE FRIEND
WHOM I HAVE NEVER SEEN

CONTENTS

		PAGE
PROLOGUE		1
CHAPTER I.		5
II.		23
III.		37
IV.		52
V.		68
VI.		79
VII.		101
VIII.		113
IX.		122
X.		148
XI.		166
XII.		181
XIII.		201
XIV.		213
XV.		224
XVI.		243

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

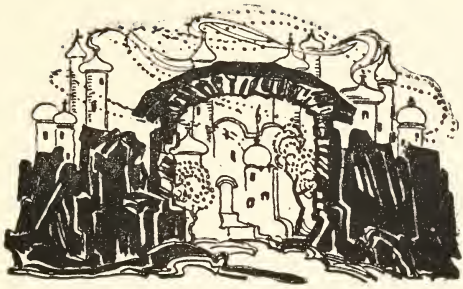
PAGE

Prince Ember stretched eager hands to receive it . 107

She saw before her a glorious figure, Prince Ember 145

The Prince led his bride home to his Palace of Good Cheer 249

THE SHADOW WITCH



PROLOGUE

COME, sit with me beside the broad hearthstone and gaze into the depths of the fire when it burns low, for not among the leaping flames alone are there to be seen marvelous things.

Deep hidden from your eyes at first, but plainly visible as you look closer, are countless forms of brightness and of beauty. You will find them among the shining coals that glimmer in scarlet and gold before you when the embers

lie clear and warm upon the hearth. You will behold them among the shadows that flit across the embers with delicate grace and changeful hues.

Here, spread wide open, is a part of the magical Land of Fire, the wonderland of the good and peaceful Ember Fairies. A golden gate gives entrance to it. Shining pathways lead through its bright gardens. Its skies are warm and glowing. Here, decked with flaming banners, stands the home of the good Prince Ember—his fairy Palace of Good Cheer. Here moves the beautiful Shadow Princess, in trailing garments of rose and amethyst. Here she may be seen in her dance of joy and ecstasy followed by her faithful band of Shadows.

Long ago, in the Land of Shadows, lived the Shadow Witch, the one beau-

tiful and loving creature in all that dim and darksome land that lies away from the Land of Fire, and between it and the Chimney Back. Close to her domain is the great Plain of Ash, where the giant, Curling Smoke, rises, where the crafty Ash Goblin lurks, where the boisterous Wind in the Chimney swoops down from out the Chimney Mouth. Near by, also, in his Cave of Darkness, her brother the Wizard works his enchantments.

If you will but hearken, I will tell you how the Shadow Witch came to leave that grim land with its evil fairies, and why it is that she now dances with happiness amid the good fairies of the Fire, in the Land of Glowing Embers. You shall hear, also, of the noble Prince Ember, and of the quest upon which he once set out. What speed he had in his high

adventure, and whether or no he brought it to a happy and fortunate close, this tale will make known to you.

CHAPTER I

ONE morning at early dawn, the Shadow Witch stole down her palace steps and out into her Garden of Shadows, to walk there alone.

Not many days before, a stranger prince, seeking to deliver a beautiful flame princess whom he loved, had passed through the Land of the Evil Fairies that lies far away from the heart of the Fire. The Shadow Witch had seen him, and at first, half in mischief, and half because she was lonely, had

tried, by her magic, to lure him away from his quest into her own land. But soon, moved by his courage and goodness, yet most of all by his faithful love to his princess, she had given him aid in his undertaking, and had saved him from destruction by her brother, the Wizard of the Cave of Darkness.

No such bright visitant had ever before come into the strange country where she dwelt, and when he departed, her dim palace, her misty woods and gardens, even her own magic, no longer gave her pleasure as they once had done.

Far from her dominions lay that lovely land from whence the prince had come, the land of the good and happy Fire Fairies. Of the bright spells, the noble magic, the joyous life of these fairies she knew nothing.

Through her dusky land she moved,

attended by her servants, the Shadows, working with them her curious, and sometimes mischievous, spells. Her brother, the Wizard, gave her no cheer, spent no love upon her, taught her nothing good, and she, for her own part, seldom sought his presence.

As she walked this morning in her garden, her dark eyes were troubled, and she let her grey garments sweep the ground unheeded, while in fancy she followed Prince Radiance, who had come for one brief hour into her dull life. She could not but wonder whether she must be always lonely as she now was, whether she must always wish in vain for such happiness as his land could give. Up and down the alleys of the garden she went, and for a long time no one came to disturb her, but at length a voice broke in upon her musings.

"Mistress of the Shadows," it said, "a messenger from your brother, the Wizard, desires to speak to you."

The Shadow Witch lifted her eyes. Before her stood her most faithful servant, Creeping Shadow.

"What is his message?" the Shadow Witch demanded.

"He declares that it is for your ear alone," the Shadow answered.

Her mistress frowned impatiently. She was in no mood to talk with him.

"He waits at the palace door," continued Creeping Shadow, "and says that he will remain there until you are pleased to receive him."

"Go, then, and bring him hither," was the reluctant answer. "I will hear what he has to say."

Creeping Shadow hastened to obey, and presently returned accompanied by

a dwarfed creature, black as the blackest soot and clad in raiment as dusky as himself. It was the Chief Imp, a trusted messenger of the Wizard.

The Shadow Witch especially disliked him. He was at times impertinent when he came on her brother's errands, therefore she held herself haughtily and folded her robes closer about her when he drew near.

But the Chief Imp bore himself humbly to-day and his disagreeable face wore an air of deep distress. He bowed himself to the earth, and waited permission to speak.

"What says your master?" demanded the Shadow Witch imperiously. "Speak."

"Alas!" groaned the Imp, as if in profound grief, "My master lies in his cavern sick unto death. He begs that you

will come to him, and, by your magic, restore him to himself."

The Shadow Witch regarded him unmoved. "Has so great a magician as my brother no magic of his own that will be potent to restore him, that he must ask aid of mine?" she inquired.

"Nay, madam," replied the Chief Imp, rolling up his eyes, "He has tried every means within his power and grows no better. He turns to you, therefore, in his extremity and beseeches you not to refuse him."

Knowing, as she did, the craftiness of her brother, the Shadow Witch heard his message with distrust. She knew that if he had discovered that it was by her help that the prince had escaped him and that evil had been brought upon himself, it would go hard with her once she was in his power. Therefore, she de-

termined, before she yielded to his request, to learn from his servant whether or not he suspected her of what she had done. So she bent a searching gaze upon the Chief Imp and began to question him.

"Tell me," she commanded, "what is this sickness from which your master suffers, and what is its cause?"

The Imp hastened to inform her. "A strange prince penetrated the Cave of Darkness, a short time since. For reasons of his own, the Wizard sought to overpower him with the spell of his Urn of Vapors, but the prince, who had come upon him without warning, suddenly flashed about him a magic weapon, the Sword of Flames, that instantly took from my master all power to protect himself. He cried aloud to us, and at once we hurried him away to an inner

chamber, far from its dreadful sway. There he lay for a time insensible, and we feared for his life, but at length, tended by his servants, he became able to move a little, and, at last, even to speak. But that is all."

"What has become of this prince and his magic sword?" demanded the Shadow Witch, watching him yet more closely. "Have you permitted him to escape with it unharmed?"

"Ah, madam," the Chief Imp replied, "When we came to seek him, to wreak vengeance upon him, he had vanished and had left no trace."

"Had this prince no servants, no companions?" insisted she. "None who guided him to my brother's cavern?"

"Nay," he assured her, "the prince was quite alone."

The Shadow Witch asked him no fur-

ther questions, but stood silent, pondering deeply whether or no she should grant the Wizard's request. She herself had seen him overcome by the fairy sword, had seen the prince depart in safety, but that her brother trusted to any magic of her own to restore him, she greatly doubted. Still, she believed that there could be no grave danger to herself in going to him. Never, even in the fulness of his power, had he been able to really injure her. Why should she fear him now, when he was helpless. Besides, from what the Imp had said, it was not known that she had guided and protected the prince. Therefore she had no cause for uneasiness.

She turned to where the Chief Imp waited, regarding her with his crafty eyes. "Go back to your master," she

bade him. "Say to him that I will come shortly to render him what aid I can."

Well pleased at the result of his errand, the Chief Imp departed.

As soon as he was out of sight the Shadow Witch beckoned Creeping Shadow to her side and instructed her with lifted finger. "I go alone to visit my brother, the Wizard, who lies ill, and has sent for me. If, however, much time passes, and I have not returned, you may be sure that some evil has befallen me. Seek me then, instantly, in the Cave of Darkness, for I shall have need of you."

Creeping Shadow swore to obey what she had been told, and her mistress, gathering her trailing robes over her arm, took her way to the Wizard's Cave.

Gloomy and forbidding was the Cave of Darkness. Its outer walls rose high and cliff-like from the great Plain of

Ash, and a yawning opening led off to its dark corridors and many dusky chambers.

The Shadow Witch had no sooner reached the Cave mouth and entered it than the Chief Imp, with a spark lantern in his hand, met her to conduct her to his master. They passed swiftly down the narrow passage and came presently to that vast black chamber called the Cave Hall, where the Wizard was wont to sit.

The Cave Hall was filled with Imps, some clustered in groups, whispering together; some lolling idly upon the soot cushions that lay about the floor; some peeping stealthily from behind the heavy curtains of soot with which the walls were hung. But their master was nowhere to be seen.

The Chief Imp went directly to the

farther wall and struck upon it with his wand. Instantly it yawned apart, and an inner corridor was revealed.

This part of the cave was strange to the Shadow Witch, but she entered boldly and followed her guide without fear through many winding ways and secret chambers, until at last he paused before a second wall. He struck upon it, as he had upon the other. It opened, in its turn, and she saw before her a room more profoundly dark than any that they had yet passed through. Its charcoal walls were set about with faintly glowing lanterns, but so heavy were the soot curtains that surrounded them that their light was almost quenched.

Here, too, were Imps, one beside each spark lantern, but in the centre of the room the Shadow Witch saw that which caused her to turn pale with misgiving,

for the Wizard of the Cave was there—not weak or ill, as she had been led to believe, but recovered and standing in the fulness of his strength.

Beholding him thus, she knew that he intended mischief against her; knew, also, that for her safety she must show no sign of fear. "After all," she thought, "my own magic will protect me. Never has it been less potent than his. It will not fail me now."

She lifted herself to her full height and stood tall and beautiful before him, her rich black hair falling like a mantle over her shoulders, her eyes gleaming like stars through the dusk. "So, you have deceived me, brother," she said coldly. "I might have known that it would be so."

"Even as you have deceived me," retorted the Wizard, bending a look of

malice upon her. "But you have been clever once too often, my sister. Did you think that I could not guess that it was you who made it possible for the stranger prince to steal upon me unawares with his Sword of Flames? Do I not know your trick of the moving curtain of shadow? It was that which screened him from my eyes until it was too late for me to destroy him. It was yourself who told him when to unsheath his sword. It was you, then, who made me suffer. But now my time has come to repay you—to make you feel the wrath of the Wizard of the Cave."

The Shadow Witch laughed scornfully. "I fear you not," she cried. "Have I not magic of my own, ay, as great even as yours, that will serve to protect me against your enchant-

ments. I defy you, then, magician though you are. You cannot harm me."

Her words were bold, but fear clutched at her heart in spite of them. Here in this deepest part of the Wizard's Cave, surrounded by his servants, and distant from her own, what would become of her if her magic failed before his? She knew that it would be folly to stay and test it. She determined to escape while there was yet time.

With a rush she attempted to dart past him, but in vain. He stretched his long arms and caught her to him, and though she struggled desperately against him, he held her fast.

"Away with the lights," shouted the Wizard hoarsely.

Obediently the Imps snatched the lanterns from the walls and vanished with them in haste, leaving the Shadow Witch

alone with her brother, wrapped in deepest darkness. By what means he wrought upon her there she could not tell, for she could neither see his face, nor hear his words. She only knew that suddenly all her magic powers departed from her, leaving her completely helpless.

In her ears the harsh voice of the Wizard sounded triumphing over her. "Thus you are repaid in part, my sister, for giving aid to my enemies. It will be long before you trick me again, for, lest you should try to give me some fresh proof of your cleverness, I have prepared for you the darkness of this prison chamber. In it no Shadow can have power, can work magic. Here you shall remain, until I choose to set you free."

He released her hands, and she sank

weakly down to the floor of the cavern. She heard his footsteps departing through the darkness and presently she knew that she was quite alone.

Lying where she had fallen, she waited until a little strength came back to her. Then she crept from side to side of her prison, groping her way with her hands, for she could see nothing. She felt the heavy soot curtains sway beneath her fingers; she felt the walls of charcoal, hard and unyielding, behind them. It was as if the room were sealed. Thus she learned that there was no faintest hope for her of escape—that she was, as the Wizard had said, completely in his power.

Yet she did not give way to despair, for she knew that her servants were many and faithful. "I will wait patiently," she whispered to herself. "It cannot be long,

for Creeping Shadow will not forget what I told her—will not fail to come to my help."

CHAPTER II

CREEPING SHADOW bore constantly in mind the parting words of her mistress, and when she had waited patiently until many hours had passed and still the Shadow Witch did not return, she knew the time had come to go in search of her. Saying nothing to her fellow-servants of her errand, she set out without further delay.

As she went through the garden and out into the dim stretches of the Land of Shadows, she kept careful watch, that

she might not overlook her dear mistress, in case she should be approaching on her homeward way.

She reached the Plain of Ash and stood for a moment to scan it far and wide. Only the grey expanse, dotted with low hills and mounds of ash lay before her. Not a living creature moved upon its surface.

Sure then that mischief had indeed befallen the Shadow Witch, she sped away across the Plain, and with an anxiously beating heart arrived at the entrance to the Cave of Darkness. She plunged into it. In the long corridor that led to the Cave Hall, she met, from time to time, Imps coming and going upon their master's business, and she hoped that they might give her some news of her mistress.

"Tell me," she cried to one, "Is my

mistress, the Shadow Witch still in the Cave?" But the Imp laughed jeeringly in her face and disappeared, making no answer.

A second servant of the Wizard passed her, and when she asked him the same question, he gave her an impertinent reply and vanished also.

More uneasy, then, than ever, because of their behavior, she went on her way in silence and came to the great Cave Hall. Never before had she entered it alone. In a huge chair, near to the farther wall, she saw the Wizard sitting. His shaggy brows were bent over a Book of Craft, wherein were written all those ancient and cruel spells in which he most delighted. An evil vapor floated from the pages of the book and, circling round his head, half hid his grim face and dingy beard. It crept along the folds of his

black garments and settled slowly about his feet, veiling them in a yellow mist.

The Shadow beheld him with dread. She feared to speak with him. But one whom she loved was in danger. Without making a sound, she drew nearer until she stood directly before him.

"Sir Wizard," she cried, "I come to seek my mistress."

Her voice, echoing through the silent Cave Hall, roused the Wizard from his evil studies. He threw back his head in angry astonishment. "You Shadows grow impudent," he exclaimed frowning. "Who has given you leave to intrude upon me in my Cave?"

In spite of the indignant glance he cast upon her, Creeping Shadow was not daunted. "I came to seek my mistress," she repeated. "She herself has bade me

do so. Tell me, then, where I shall find her?"

"You seek her here in vain," declared the Wizard. "I will give you no news of her, neither will I be disturbed. Begone at once or it will be the worse for you."

"Nay, but I must know what you have done to her," persisted Creeping Shadow. "It was to follow the Chief Imp, whom you sent, that she left her Garden of Shadows. It was here that she bade me seek her if she did not return. The time has been long, and I have come to obey her commands."

The sharp eyes of the Wizard flashed with wrath. "What if she be here?" he thundered, smiting shut his Book of Craft. "She is my sister, and when she offends me I shall punish her as I choose. Learn the truth then. She lies hidden in

the deepest part of my cavern, in a dungeon so dark that she can work none of her grey magic therein; in a dungeon so remote that none of her servants can ever penetrate to it; a dungeon whose walls are so tightly sealed, so cleverly enchanted, that she will try in vain to make her escape. There she shall remain until I choose to set her free. I have told you. Go now, and let me see your face no more."

At these words, so remorseless and cruel, a wailing cry broke from the lips of Creeping Shadow. Even a worse fate than she had feared had overtaken the beautiful Shadow Witch. She threw herself in anguish at the Wizard's feet to plead with him for the release of her mistress, but he would not hear her.

"Go, as I bade you," he commanded, spurning her from him with force. "Go,

lest I summon my servants to bind you fast, and place you in a prison as drear and lonely as hers."

Creeping Shadow saw that there was no hope, that nothing would move his hard heart to mercy. Moreover, his threat overwhelmed her with terror, for if she herself were imprisoned, there would be none to bring help to her mistress, since none but herself knew that she was in the Cave of Darkness.

She rose to her feet, and with bowed head passed from the Cave Hall without another word. Her heart was very heavy, for at first she could think of no one to whom she could turn for assistance. The Shadows, without their mistress, were powerless against the Wizard. All others in the land were not only as wicked as he, as she well knew, but every one of them, Curling Smoke, the Giant

of the Seven Hills of Ash, the Dragon of the Gloomy Vale, and the Ash Goblin, would be instantly ready to join with him against his sister. From the Wind in the Chimney, also, nothing but ill usage could be expected.

The more she pondered, the deeper grew her despair, and every moment lost was precious. She wrung her hands in her distress.

Then, suddenly she remembered one who was not evil—one who would surely befriend the Shadow Witch. It was the Elf—the good Elf, who dwells in the Borderland that stretches beyond the Plain of Ash and away toward the Kingdom of Earth. Very old and wise is the Elf. He knows the ways of the Evil Fairies who dwell in the countries that lie away from the heart of the Fire; knows much of their dark magic and

mischievous enchantments. He knows something, also, of the good Fire Fairies and their bright spells. Safe in his home amid the ash of the Borderland, he sees the Wind in the Chimney swoop down upon the Borderland and even out across the broad Hearthstone in his boldness, but he knows no fear of him. He sees the giant, Curling Smoke, rise stealthily from his lurking places, sees him grow vaster, and vaster, until, when he chooses he darkens all the sky, but of him, also, he is unafraid. The Ash Goblin creeps forth from his low dwelling, prying into the affairs of others and seeking what mischief he may do, but the Elf goes his way undisturbed, knowing himself secure against him.

No one who comes to the Elf of the Borderland for help in any good deed comes in vain. Thinking of this, hope

rose in the breast of Creeping Shadow. Sure that he would not fail her, she determined to appeal to him at once.

Like an arrow she sped out of the Cave and swept down the cliff-side and across the Plain in noiseless haste. The Ash Goblin met her, and would have detained her to ask her business, but she escaped him without reply. In trembling fear of the Wind, who might swoop down upon her, she approached the Chimney Mouth, but she had the good fortune to pass by it in safety.

She had entered the Borderland and was not far from the Elf's door, when suddenly she encountered him. He was sitting quietly upon a mound of ash, a curious little figure, with eyes that twinkled with a kindly light under thick fuzzy brows. His fuzzy ears stood out from beneath a peaked cap; his pudgy

hands were almost hidden by the sleeves of the soft ashen garment that clothed him from head to foot.

He saw Creeping Shadow approaching and knowing at once from her face that she was in trouble, he guessed that she had come to ask his help. So he beckoned her to a seat beside him and listened to her story with the keenest attention, hearing her through to the last word without interrupting her.

"And now," Creeping Shadow besought him, when she had told him all, "What can be done to deliver my dear mistress? There is none so wise and kind as yourself. Advise me, I beg of you." With eyes fastened eagerly upon his face she awaited his answer.

"There is but one thing to do," returned the Elf instantly. "You must obtain the assistance of some noble Prince

—one who, by the power of his good magic, can overcome the Wizard, and set her free."

"Alas!" sighed Creeping Shadow, "Where might such a prince be found? You know as well as I that all in this land are evil and use evil enchantments."

"True," he answered. "From this land no help can come for the Shadow Witch. But you must not forget the Land of Fire. In it there are many good and powerful fairies, and among them is Prince Radiance. You must go to him and tell him of this desperate plight of your mistress. He will not refuse to come to her relief."

Creeping Shadow shook her head slowly. "I cannot believe that he will do so," she asserted, "for not long since my mistress caused him great distress and disappointment by leading him astray."

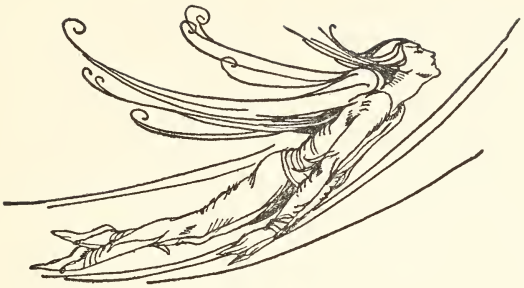
"Ay, that she did," agreed her companion. "But she made amends for it immediately afterward by rendering him a noble service. He himself told me of it with gratitude. I am certain that he has not forgotten it and will be glad to repay his great debt."

So confidently did the Elf speak that Creeping Shadow took heart once more. She rose quickly from her seat. "If you will but tell me where to find him, I will go and appeal to him at once," she declared.

"You must seek him in King Red Flame's dominions, in the Palace of Burning Coals," the Elf instructed her. "There he dwells with his bride, the lovely Princess White Flame, whom he delivered from the enchantment of the wicked Earth Fairy. Whether or no he is able to come himself to the rescue of

your mistress, remains to be discovered, but this much is certain: he will see to it that she is not left a prisoner in the hands of her brother the Wizard. And now, come. I will conduct you to the boundaries of the Land of Fire. Once you enter its dominions you will find many friends, for its fairies are kind and gentle and will do everything in their power to guide you in safety to your journey's end."

Cheered and consoled by his words, Creeping Shadow set out in his company, and when at length she thanked the good Elf and bade him farewell on the borders of the Land of Fire, she was able to go forward alone with hope and confidence.



CHAPTER III

IN the Land of the Fire Fairies great happiness reigned. Only a little while before Prince Radiance had brought the lovely Princess White Flame safely home to her father, after many perilous and strange adventures, and King Red Flame had rewarded the noble Prince with his daughter's hand. In the King's marvelous palace, the Palace of Burning Coals, their fairy wedding had been celebrated with outbursts of joy and exultation.

In the very heart of the King's dominions stood the palace, perfect in beauty, from its dazzling foundations to its topmost flaming turret. Brightness unquenchable shone from its walls, warmth and the spirit of friendliness streamed from its windows and wide-flung golden doors. Beyond it, in the garden of the Princess, the exquisite flame-roses and stately fire-lilies unfolded to a richer, fuller beauty. The huge fire-oak, under which Prince Radiance had first beheld the enchanted Princess as a fine white flame, rustled its ruddy leaves and glowed more intensely from root to crown, almost as though it knew and rejoiced in the part which it had played in the fortunes of this happy wedded pair.

Throughout the whole kingdom a gentle music filled the warm air and charmed the ear—the music of fairy

voices, the music of whispering flames, the music of tripping feet—all the sweet sounds of the fire gathered into one continuous strain of gladness, now high and clear, as if it could not be restrained, now low and soft, as if even in quietness all must still murmur the praise of the King and his beloved children.

Into this land of wondrous light and beauty came Creeping Shadow, marveling at what she saw, awed by it, stirred by it, sure in her heart that from a place so bright, so pure, so lovely, help must come for her imprisoned mistress. The Elf of the Borderland had spoken truly: from the moment she had entered the Land of the Fire Fairies, she had met with nothing but kindness. The fairies had looked with wonder upon this stranger with the sorrowful face and trailing robes of grey, but all had helped

her on her journey, and none had asked her more than she had cared to tell.

Twilight had come when, foot-sore and weary, she reached the Palace of Burning Coals. The palace gardens, lovely in the softened glow of evening, were deserted; the fire-lilies stood tall and lonely by the garden paths; but from every window of the palace streamed brilliant lights, and from its doorway floated sounds of joy and laughter. It was that pleasant hour of evening in which the fairies, their tasks in fields and house and garden completed, came freely to the palace hall to dance and sing and tell, in the King's presence, tales of past adventure and noble deeds.

Creeping Shadow stood timidly at the gate for a moment, longing yet fearing to enter. How could she dare to hope that the Prince would turn from a place

so bright and joyous to come to the aid of her mistress in a drear and dangerous land?

But the need of the Shadow Witch was too great to be set aside. Her servant cast off her fears and stole silently through the garden and up to the radiant door. Pausing on its threshold, her dark eyes traveled straight down the palace hall to the vast room that opened beyond, and there, upon a tall golden throne, King Red Flame sat. At his right hand stood he whom she had come to seek. She remembered him well, that brave and handsome Prince, whom her mistress had for a time deluded by her magic in the Land of Shadows. His yellow locks fell as softly over his shoulders, his noble countenance wore the same high look of courage and good cheer as on that day. His scarlet velvet cloak and cap,

his waving feather, were the very same. Close beside him was the Princess, in shining robes, with floating hair of the palest gold. Never before had the Shadow seen her, but from her charming face, so tender and beautiful, she knew that it could be none else, knew, also, that no cry for help and pity could come to her in vain.

Gathering her grey robes closer about her, Creeping Shadow entered boldly, and sped through the hall. Groups of gaily chattering fire-fairies saw this strange visitant flit by them, but were too startled and amazed to check her as she passed. So she came unhindered into the presence of the royal company.

But before she had reached them, the Princess saw her. With a low cry of terror, she caught the Prince's hand. "See Radiance! See who comes!" she whis-

pered tremulously. "Is not this one from that grim land where we once wandered so long?"

Then the Prince saw her also and knew her to be a servant of the Shadow Witch, yet before he could answer, Creeping Shadow had reached them and had thrown herself at King Red Flame's feet.

"Hear me, oh, King," she implored, "I am Creeping Shadow. I come not to bring evil, but to beseech aid from Prince Radiance for my mistress, the Shadow Witch, who is now in bitter trouble, and who not long since was a true friend to him."

Touched by the sorrow in her voice, King Red Flame gave gracious answer. "Arise, Creeping Shadow, and speak without fear. I give my royal word that

whatever we can do to succor your mistress shall surely be done."

Prince Radiance stooped down and himself raised the Shadow to her feet. "Your mistress was indeed my friend," he declared. "I can never forget my debt to her. Tell us quickly, what is this trouble that has befallen her?"

To their words the Princess White Flame added gently, "Yes, tell us, for not my Prince alone, but my father and myself, also, are debtors to the Shadow Witch."

Thus cheered and encouraged, Creeping Shadow began her tale, surrounded by the pitying fairies, all eager to show their sympathy for her and their desire to befriend her.

When all was told, Prince Radiance, without waiting for the King to speak, cried at once, "Your Majesty, my duty

is plain. The Shadow Witch must not be left to suffer punishment because of me. Let me go at once to her rescue. With my Sword of Flames, by which I so lately conquered the Wizard, I can again put him to naught."

For a moment the King made no answer. At the generous words of the Prince, a sob of joy broke from Creeping Shadow, but Princess White Flame shuddered. In memory she saw again the dark cavern of the Wizard, remembered its cruel master, and the evil spell by which he had endeavored to destroy her Prince; and for a brief space she forgot the sore trouble of the Shadow Witch, helpless and in that Wizard's power. It was but for an instant, however; then her voice, tender and full of sympathy arose, quivering though it was with her fears for the safety of her

Prince. "Ah, no! We cannot let her suffer! You must go."

"Come, come quickly then," breathed Creeping Shadow. "Come, while there is yet time."

Before the Prince could make further answer to her plea, King Red Flame interposed with firm, yet gentle, authority. "Stay, my son. In so grave a matter we must take no step amiss. We must seek the best counsel that our kingdom affords. The Wise One alone, out of his great store of wisdom, will know how to give it."

With lifted hand he summoned his swiftest messenger. "Go, Rushing Flame," he commanded. "Say to the Wise One that the King has need of him."

In haste Rushing Flame departed, and in a deep silence, broken only now and

then by the low whispering of the fire fairies, all awaited the coming of the Wise One.

So ready was the Wise One to give counsel wherever it was required, that much sooner than could have been expected from one of his age, he stood before the King. Creeping Shadow, lifting her eyes eagerly, beheld a very ancient fairy, clad in deep scarlet. His beard was white as snow. His eyes were piercingly keen. Never had she seen anyone who looked at once so ancient and so wise.

"Your Majesty," said the Wise One gravely, making him a low obeisance, "How can I serve you?"

"Give me of your good counsel," King Red Flame besought him. "Far away in the cave of her brother, the Wizard, the Shadow Witch lies im-

prisoned, not for any fault of hers, but for her kindness to Prince Radiance and my beloved daughter. Her servant Creeping Shadow, whom you see yonder, has come to beg the Prince to haste to her deliverance. What say you? If he goes, will he have power to deliver her? If he goes, will he return in safety?"

Anxiously Princess White Flame fixed her eyes upon the Wise One's face, and awaited his answer to her father's question. No less anxiously did Creeping Shadow listen to hear the fate of her dear mistress.

"Nay, Your Majesty," replied the Wise One, with great earnestness, "deeply as the Prince is indebted to the Shadow Witch, brave though he is and potent as is his Sword of Flames against

the Wizard, it is not given to him to deliver her."

Hearing his words, tears rushed to the eyes of Creeping Shadow. "Alas! alas! My poor mistress!" she sobbed. "If this be true, what is to become of her in the dense darkness where she lies captive with all her magic power gone?

A low murmur of pity ran from one to the other of the kind-hearted fire fairies, from the King himself, to the humblest fairy gathered there.

Princess White Flame laid a consoling hand upon Creeping Shadow's shoulder. "Wait but a moment," she told her. "The Wise One has great knowledge, great wisdom. No magic is hid from him. Somewhere there must be one who can bring succor to your mistress. The Wise One will know of

him, and can tell us where he may be found."

"You speak truly, my Princess," the Wise One hastened to inform her. "It is written in my Book of Wisdom that when this misfortune falls upon the Shadow Witch, there is but one who can release her from that enchanted chamber where the Wizard now holds her, but one who can bring her unharmed through the perils which will afterward beset her."

"His name?" cried the King, Prince Radiance and the Princess, in one voice. "His name?" cried Creeping Shadow beseechingly.

"Sire, it is your nephew, Prince Ember," declared the Wise One. "He it is who is fated to set her free."

From all those who had waited in breathless suspense for his answer, there

burst a murmur of intense relief. Creeping Shadow's heart beat quick with joy.

"And the perils of which you spoke, —shall my dear nephew, also, escape them unscathed?" demanded King Red Flame anxiously.

"Ay, truly, Your Majesty," the ancient one assured him. "All will be well, if he but follows my advice. Send him to me, and I will instruct him."

His counsel given, the Wise One bade farewell to his master and returned to his hut.

Once more Rushing Flame set out in haste on the King's business, but this time it was to summon Prince Ember, that he might learn from the royal lips the task that was his to perform.

CHAPTER IV

BEAUTIFUL is the Land of Glowing Embers, near to the Palace of King Red Flame. When morning dawns, a light soft and rosy bathes its castles and its gardens. At noonday, its pale sweet glow burns to a richer glory, and a flush of deepest rose ascends over turrets and blossoming trees. With nightfall, a purple splendor settles over all things while its peaceful fairies sleep. Set in the midst of it is the home of Prince Ember, the fairy palace of Good Cheer.

In his favorite room in the palace Prince Ember sat alone, in deep thought. Spread open upon the table before him was a thick volume, written in the ancient fairy language, filled with tales of fairy adventure of a far off time. As he read and pondered them, his heart was filled with longing that he, too, might go upon some dangerous quest, might win some noble victory. His domain was quiet. His servants were happy and at peace. He knew of nothing that could call him forth.

Tall and straight of limb and very handsome was this prince of the Land of Glowing Embers. Ruddy gold was his hair, like the fire when it glows most richly. His eyes were bright and kind. The cloak that hung from his shoulders was deep red and fell over red garments of yet deeper hue. From his round red

cap a black feather drooped to mingle with the glory of his hair.

As yet he had no princess, for as yet he had seen none who stirred his heart, though for want of her he was sometimes lonely, even in his Palace of Good Cheer.

The fairies of his dominions loved him well and served him with zeal, for none was kinder, none more nobly just, than their own Prince Ember.

Sitting in his palace on this summer evening, he remembered the brave deeds which Prince Radiance had lately done, —deeds not less splendid than these which were written in this ancient book.

And while he sighed, because he felt that for him there could be no such high adventures, Rushing Flame was speeding toward his palace, on the errand of the King. The messenger gave no heed,

in his swift passing, to the loveliness of the land, but turning neither to right nor left, came straight to the arched and golden gate that gave entrance to the gardens of the Prince.

Like an arrow he sped through it and on to the palace door. An Ember Fairy opened to his knock and, when he told his business, led him quickly to the Prince.

"Your Highness," he announced, "Rushing Flame is here, with a message from the King."

"Speak, Rushing Flame," commanded the Prince. "What word do you bring me from His Majesty?"

"That you will come to him at once," the messenger replied. "There are important matters that require your presence."

"Know you aught of what these matters may be?" demanded Prince Ember.

"This much only I may tell you, Your Highness. They concern a dangerous and difficult adventure. More than this you must learn from the King himself," answered Rushing Flame.

Prince Ember sprang to his feet, his eyes kindling with eagerness. "See that my horse is brought quickly to the palace door," he cried to the Ember Fairy, who still lingered near, "for I go in haste to my uncle, the King."

The fairy obeyed, and presently the hoof-beats of the ruddy charger that bore the Prince resounded on the road that led to the Palace of Burning Coals.

A good steed and a swift, was he. Before Rushing Flame, with all his speed, had gone half the distance homeward, the Prince alighted at the door of his

uncle's palace and a moment later presented himself before the King.

"Ah, my dear Ember," exclaimed King Red Flame, grasping his hand, "your presence is most earnestly desired, for there has come to us a servant of the Shadow Witch, beseeching help for her mistress, who now lies captive to her brother, the Wizard of the Cave of Darkness. This punishment he inflicts upon her, because of her kindness to Prince Radiance and my daughter. Gladly would Prince Radiance prove his gratitude by hasting to her deliverance, but the Wise One has declared that it would be in vain—has declared that it is yourself, and none other, who is fated to set her free. Since this is so, is it your desire to go upon this adventure?"

"Ah, Your Majesty!" cried Prince Ember, his countenance glowing with

ardor, "no task could be more welcome. I am ready to set forth immediately."

The King was greatly pleased, and Creeping Shadow, her anxious fears at rest, bowed herself at Prince Ember's feet in gratitude too deep for speech. The hearts of Prince Radiance and Princess White Flame overflowed with joy since the deliverance of the Shadow Witch seemed now assured, and their happiness was reflected in the faces of all the fairies gathered there.

King Red Flame spoke again. "That your success in this adventure may be made certain, you must first go to the Wise One and receive his instructions. If you obey them, he assures me that you cannot fail."

"I will give good heed to them," Prince Ember promised him.

So saying he took his leave and fol-

lowed by Creeping Shadow, set out on foot for the home of the Wise One.

The queer little hut where the Wise One lived was not far off, and soon they stood before its door. Creeping Shadow looked with astonishment at its bright red walls, covered with magic inscriptions, whose meaning was hidden from all but the Wise One. She beheld with amazement the chimneys, like lighted torches, that topped its roof and the blazing flame-bushes that surrounded it. When the Prince knocked on the quaintly carved door and entered at the Wise One's word, she drew back quickly and seated herself under a flame-bush until he should again appear.

Within the hut the Prince found the aged fairy awaiting him. "Hail, Prince Ember," said he, rising to greet him. "You go upon a noble quest."

"I go gladly," replied the Prince, and the words came from his heart.

"You must not go unprepared," returned the Wise One. "Upon those fairy gifts that you carry with you, upon the use that you make of them, the success of your adventure depends."

"And what shall these gifts be?" inquired the Prince.

"First of all, a sword," was the instant answer. "A fairy sword of power."

"Alas!" sighed the Prince. "That I do not possess."

"It can be provided," returned the Wise One, smiling. He stepped to an ancient chest, deeply carved with mystic signs, that stood quite by itself in a corner of the hut. From out that chest many magic gifts had come, when need was great. Filled to the brim with treasures as it always was, none saw aught

within but those gifts which were for his own use.

The Wise One bent down and fitted a key in the lock. After its manner the key turned of itself in the lock; after its manner the lid rose of itself upon its huge hinges.

"Come," said the Wise One, "and behold your sword."

Prince Ember stepped quickly to his side. Before his eyes, close sheathed in its shining scabbard, lay the fairy sword of power. A thrill of awe passed through him at the sight.

"Take it," commanded the Wise One.

The Prince lifted it out, and as he unsheathed it, at the Wise One's word, it filled the hut with a burning glow. Heat, intense and ardent, streamed from it, making warm the air.

"This is the Sword of Fire," the an-

cient fairy told him. "As potent it will be in your hands and for your use, as was the Sword of Flames in the hands of Prince Radiance. In every danger that you must meet, over every obstacle that you must encounter, save one, it will be victorious."

Prince Ember's heart beat fast. "And for that other?" he asked eagerly.

"For that, also, I have a gift," was the answer. "Look within the chest once more and you will see."

Leaning down the Prince peered into the dimness of the chest. "There is a small round box," he said.

"Take it, and open it," commanded the Wise One.

Obediently Prince Ember drew it forth and undid its clasp. He looked within and saw a bit of charcoal, black and glistening; nothing more. He re-

garded it with astonishment. "What power has this to help me?" he inquired.

"Its power is great," returned the Wise One, gravely. "Guard it with care. When escape for yourself and for the Shadow Witch seems impossible, take it out, and cast it boldly into the midst of the danger that threatens you, and by its good spell your way to safety will be made clear."

The Prince thanked him. He closed the box, and placed it carefully in his breast.

"In order that you may succeed in this undertaking," continued his adviser, "you must be able to reach the prison of the Shadow Witch unseen. You know, as well as I, that among the good fairies of the Fire, only the Ember Fairies have power to become entirely invisible. Within the Wizard's Cave your own

magic will serve to make you so, but in the Plain outside you must have the Cloak of Ash."

"This, also, you will give me?" demanded the Prince with quickening breath.

"Nay, I have it not," answered the Wise One, shaking his head. "Only the Elf of the Borderland can bestow this upon you, for he alone, together with his elves, possesses the secret of its making. Moreover it must be woven in the presence of him who is to wear it; otherwise it has no power. Go to him and ask it. He will not refuse you. Creeping Shadow, who knows where he is to be found, will guide you to him. Do in all things as I have advised you, and you will not fail."

So Prince Ember, with grateful words bade the Wise One good-bye and de-

parted with his gifts, and as he left the hut, Creeping Shadow arose from her seat beneath the flame-bush and came to walk beside him and guide him to the Borderland.

Quite alone, in the Borderland, stands the house of the good grey Elf. Its door was fast shut and its windows closed when Prince Ember and Creeping Shadow approached it. The thick thatch of ash which covered its roof and came low down upon its walls so concealed it from view, that had he been without his companion to guide him, the Prince might have sought for it long in vain.

When they had reached it, Creeping Shadow stood still. "This is the house of the Elf," she said. Then, turning, she pointed to a high black cliff that rose in the distance. "And yonder is the Cave of Darkness, where the Wizard

dwells, and my poor mistress lies imprisoned. As soon as you have left the Elf, lose no time in reaching her, I beg of you, for the Wizard is very cruel, and I know not what he may do to her if help is long delayed. When you have climbed the steep path which leads up the cliff-side, you will behold the entrance to the cavern yawning before you. As for myself, I shall return now to the Land of Shadows, to await in hope the home-coming of my mistress."

She turned again and struck upon the Elf's door thrice. It was the signal of the servants of the Shadow Witch. In silence the door swung open, and the Prince set his foot upon the threshold.

"Farewell, noble and generous Prince," murmured Creeping Shadow. "Good speed, and a safe return."

"Farewell," said Prince Ember. "Rest

confident that I shall bring home the Shadow Witch in triumph." He passed within, and as silently as it had opened, the door closed upon him.

CHAPTER V

ALONE, in the deep darkness of her prison, sat the Shadow Witch growing paler and sadder every day. She was beginning to fear that after all Creeping Shadow could do nothing to help her, for how could she ever penetrate to this dungeon, with its thick walls that hemmed her in. She doubted not that the Wizard kept the entrance to the Cave closely guarded; indeed he had told her that it was so.

Daily her food was brought to her by

the Chief Imp, who grew more and more impertinent to her. Daily her brother came to taunt her with her weakness—with his own power over her. Proudly as she bore herself, she could not but dread his coming, could not but wonder what he might still have in store for her of punishment and suffering.

Never before had she so hated the evil magic of the Wizard and his friends; and even her own magic, which she had always used more in mischief than with evil in her heart, had grown detestable to her.

The longing to escape became so great that she could hardly endure it, but with each visit from her brother, her hope of freedom became less and less, so scornfully did he laugh at her when she demanded to know when she should be set at liberty.

One day, as she sat thinking bitterly of the hardness of her lot, she heard once again the sound of approaching footsteps, and, immediately after, the wall parted, and her brother entered. The lanterns of the Imps who came with him, cast but a dim light in the thick darkness, yet faint as it was, the Shadow Witch felt herself revive a little. She gathered up all her strength and rose to face the Wizard defiantly. In silence the Imps flocked in and ranged themselves along the soot-hung walls. The Wizard advanced toward his sister with his cruel smile.

"Well, my clever sister," he asked her jeeringly, "how fares it with you now, in this pleasant resting-place?"

The dark eyes of the Shadow Witch rested coldly upon his face, but she vouchsafed him no reply.

"Here, it is true, you have no special opportunity to do further mischief," continued the Wizard, "and that is a hardship for you, to be sure. But you have plenty of time for repentance, which you need far more. As for your Land of Shadows, word has come to me that your servant, Black Shadow, holds sway in your absence. Nay, more, that she rejoices in her power, and is none too eager for your return."

Still the Shadow Witch made no reply. She did not doubt what he said, for she knew well the boldness and insolence of Black Shadow, but she would not gratify him by showing that she cared in the least.

"And Creeping Shadow," he went on, "that other servant in whom, above all the rest, you have had confidence, she,

also, has joined herself to Black Shadow, and obeys her in all things."

"In that I know you speak falsely," retorted the Shadow Witch. "There is none more faithful to me than Creeping Shadow. Nothing could turn her away from her loyalty to me. I have many other servants, also who love me, and serve me well."

"She did not show herself loyal when she sought me in my Cave not long since," observed the Wizard, stroking his dingy beard with a slow hand. "At first she did indeed pretend to desire your freedom; at first she wept and pleaded with me for your release, as though she were in earnest, but when she found that I gave no heed to her, she cast off all disguise, and showed plainly that she rejoiced in your imprisonment. She even went so far as to try to bargain with

me to hold you here. She needed not to bargain, my good sister, for nothing could change my purpose toward yourself. I have determined that in this prison you shall find all of home or kingdom that will be yours for many a day."

"Naught that you can say would serve to convince me that Creeping Shadow is a traitor," she answered. "Why should I trust your word in place of what I know of her? The day of my deliverance may be far off, the way of its accomplishment may be hard, but I shall be freed at last. For this my faithful servants work, as you shall find."

Still the Wizard sought to stir her, to break down her courage. "How unfortunate it is that you have no prince to aid in this good work," he taunted. "Such a prince as Radiance, perhaps—he, whom you ran such risks to aid. But

he has returned to the Land of Fire with his pale princess and will hardly trouble himself now to release you from the punishment that you are enduring because of him."

Proudly the Shadow Witch raised her head, and for the first time since her imprisonment there were tears in her beautiful eyes. "Whether or no he remembers me in the midst of his joy," she answered, "Whether or no he will succor me in my need, I shall never be sorry that I helped him to deliver his Princess. He it was who first brought brightness into my dreary land. He it was, who, for the first time in my life, made me to know what it is to be noble. Happy am I, then, even here and now, that it was given me to serve him. Proud am I with a far different pride than any that I have known before."

The Wizard heard her in amaze. Had his sister taken leave of her senses? What had come over the mischief-loving Shadow Witch that she should speak in this fashion? "You behave strangely, sister," he replied sharply. "Can it be that it was something more than the mere pleasure of outwitting and injuring me that led you to aid this impudent stranger, enemy to your people and to all who dwell in this land?"

"Ay," returned the Shadow Witch boldly. "It was indeed something more. I could not see one so brave and good become the victim of your evil magic; nor allow his happiness to be destroyed by those wicked ones who plotted for his destruction. He has awakened me to what we are, and I tell you now that if once I escape from the power of your dark spell, I shall bid you and your friends

farewell forever. If in my own Land of Shadows I can cause to spring up a better magic than it has known heretofore, it will be well. But if that hope proves vain, I shall forsake my home, and go to that land of brightness and good magic from whence this prince came, and there learn nobler ways and find a truer home."

At these words of his sister, the Wizard burst forth in such furious rage that his Imps, hearing, shrank back close to the wall of the cavern, trembling with fright. "Miserable creature," he shouted. "Is it not enough that you have brought suffering upon me, that you should go to the Land of Fire, carrying with you the secrets of all who dwell in this land? Traitor! Until now I had meant to punish you but for a time; but now I know that to release you is to pre-

pare misfortune and betrayal for every one of us. It shall never, never be. You have warned me in time. You have sealed your own doom. Never, while I have power to keep you within these walls, shall you escape to carry out your purpose."

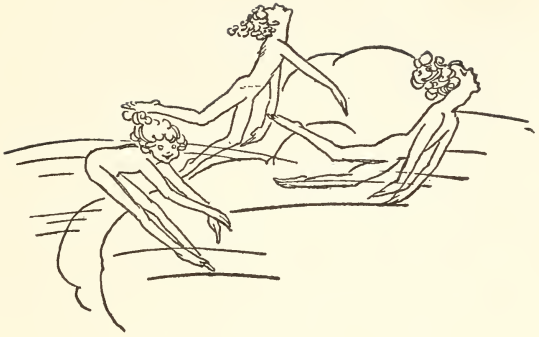
"You may well say while you have power to keep me," retorted the Shadow Witch. "Do what you may, I shall yet be freed. Then I shall go where I will."

Still more enraged by her unshaken defiance, the Wizard sprang upon her and grasped her wrists. He towered above her dark and forbidding. He gave a sharp command to the Imps, and in an instant they had departed with the lanterns. In the thick darkness that followed, the Shadow Witch heard him say nothing more, but she felt that same strange magic stream from his hands

that she had felt on the day that she had first entered her prison, and she became as weak and helpless as she did before.

When he had gone and the wall had closed behind him, she fell to weeping wildly; not for Prince Radiance, whom she should see no more, but for that noble brightness that he had once brought to her eyes, and with the dread in her heart that it would never be hers.

Yet, even as she wept, ever nearer and nearer to the Cave of Darkness came Prince Ember, hasting from the Land of Fire upon the glorious adventure of her deliverance.



CHAPTER VI

IN one thing the Wizard had spoken truly: Black Shadow was a faithless servant. As yet she had not dared to attempt to rule over her fellow-servants, but she longed for such power and was always hoping that some day she might obtain it. In her heart she rebelled against her mistress; she would rebel outwardly when it was safe to do so. After a long time had passed and still the

Shadow Witch had not returned, she began to believe that some evil had overtaken her, and if she could have been certain of it, it would have pleased her well.

Her companions, becoming alarmed at the prolonged absence of their mistress, had sought for her diligently in every part of her dominions, but at last they had been compelled to give up the search. They knew that Creeping Shadow also had departed, though upon what errand they could not guess. Now they waited in mournful silence, beneath the overhanging trees of the garden, hoping that they soon might have tidings of them both.

Leaving them there Black Shadow walked apart, and as she walked she pondered ceaselessly as to how soon she might venture to snatch at some part at

least of the power she so greatly desired.

Creeping Shadow, on her homeward way, drawing nigh to the garden, saw her dark figure stealing solitary among the dim alleys, her head bent upon her breast, as if in painful thought, but she could not see her face. "She grieves for the absence of our dear mistress," said the faithful servant to herself. "How rejoiced she will be to hear of her approaching deliverance." She called to her consolingly: "Black Shadow! Oh, Black Shadow! I bring good news!"

Hearing the voice, Black Shadow raised her head. Her face, which till then had been free from grief or anxiety, changed suddenly to that of one who had sorrowed deeply, and who for the first time hopes. "Good news?" cried she. "Ah, if it comes from our mistress, tell it

quickly! We have mourned her absence so bitterly and so long!"

With such eagerness did she speak, so sincere was the sound of her voice, that Creeping Shadow did not suspect her of deceit, but made haste to tell her of her visit to the Wizard's Cave, and of all that had happened since that time.

Black Shadow drank in every word and pretended to be overjoyed. "What is this gift which the Prince is to receive from the Elf of the Borderland?" she asked curiously when Creeping Shadow ceased to speak.

"That was not told me," replied Creeping Shadow. "My duty was but to lead him to the Elf's door and there leave him."

Her companion bit her lip with vexation, because she was unable to discover the business that had taken Prince Em-

ber to the Elf. The knowledge would have meant much to her, if she could have gained possession of it. She said nothing more about the matter, however, but asked many questions concerning the Prince, and Creeping Shadow, suspecting no evil, told her all that she could, without reserve.

When Black Shadow saw that she had learned all that her companion had to tell, she laid her hand upon her arm. "Come," said she. "We must tell the others. They, no less than ourselves, have grieved over the absence of our dearly loved mistress."

Creeping Shadow was but too eager to do so, and they set out at once. They had gone but a little way when they came upon all the rest of the Shadows, still sitting beneath the trees, talking sadly among themselves with hushed voices.

When their fellow-servants saw the two approaching they sprang quickly to their feet and hurried toward them, hoping that at last tidings of the Shadow Witch had come.

Creeping Shadow could not contain herself until they met, but called to them, "Rejoice! Rejoice, for soon our mistress will return to us again!"

At this glad news they all broke forth into joyful cries and rushed to her side with rapid and excited questions, and no sooner had she begun to answer them than Black Shadow, seizing her opportunity, slipped silently away from them and losing herself among the trees, stole unobserved out of the garden.

With all speed she took her way to the steep cliff that led to the Cave of Darkness; swiftly and steadily she mounted it till she came to the mouth of the cav-

ern. She entered without pause. Strictly as it was guarded by the Imps whom the Wizard had placed there, that none might enter to bring help to the Shadow Witch, no one of them challenged Black Shadow. They knew her and her ways —knew, also, that whatever might be her errand, she was always a welcome guest to their master. An Imp at once came to light her way, and she followed his flickering lantern until she came out at last into the Cave Hall.

There she beheld the Wizard deeply engaged. He sat in his huge armchair before a table, on which lay an ebony box filled with those wands with which he worked his darkest magic. He took up the wands, one by one, and ran his fingers over them carefully to test their power and having satisfied himself that they were in perfect order, he wrapped

each one separately in a black cloth and laid it back in its place within the casket.

The Imps were not allowed to come nearer to these wands at any time than to touch the carefully locked casket as they bore it to and from its place in their master's treasure chamber, but they watched the Wizard from a distance with eyes that twinkled sharply with curiosity as he sat handling them openly in their presence.

Black Shadow drew near to him, and the Wizard suddenly perceiving her, swept the remaining wands together abruptly and placed them in the casket at once. He snapped the lid of it and locked it with a small and twisted key which he drew from his garments. This done, he gave his attention to his visitor.

"What is your errand, Black Shadow?" he demanded, leaning back in

his chair, and composing himself to listen.

"I bring strange news," she replied, taking the seat before him to which he had waved her. "Creeping Shadow has returned from the Land of Fire, bringing word that a prince is on his way to deliver the Shadow Witch from your hands."

"A prince?" exclaimed the Wizard, starting forward in astonishment.

"Even so," answered Black Shadow.

"Tell me not that it is Prince Radiance," he cried vehemently, for anguish seized him at the memory of the Sword of Flames.

"Nay," returned she. "It is a stranger prince, Ember by name, who knows not this land, nor the dangers which lie in wait for him here. What weapons of defence he possesses, or what his magic

we cannot guess. This only I can tell you, he is in the home of the Elf of the Borderland at this moment, there to obtain, perhaps, some gift, or some instruction which will make him proof against us. Whether or not Creeping Shadow speaks falsely, she has declared to me that she knows nothing concerning his business with the Elf."

"I have no fear of anyone so small and peaceable as the Elf of the Borderland," laughed the Wizard contemptuously. "It could not be in his power to bestow a gift of any worth. As for the prince—my servants shall redouble their vigilance at the Cave Mouth. He cannot pass them."

"Be not too sure of that," Black Shadow warned him. "Of the magic of these fairies of the Fire we know nothing. If he possesses some enchantment

by which he can pass your guards unseen, if he should find and liberate your sister, and escape with her from your Cave—what then? Shall one who has foiled you thus be allowed to return unmolested to his own land?"

For a short space the Wizard sat plunged in thought, for he knew well that beyond the boundaries of his Cave he had no power. But presently he spoke. "I have friends who will prevent that," he declared confidently. "Curling Smoke waits but the word to engage himself against any who come from the Land of Fire. The Ash Goblin needs no urging against my sister. Too often she has made sport of him, until he has not known which way to turn for anger. And as to the Wind in the Chimney, merely to speak to him is to gain his consent to swoop down at once upon any ad-

venturer into our lands. Seek these friends of mine, Black Shadow, and bid them lie in wait for this bold prince. Say to them that the Wizard of the Cave relies upon their aid."

Black Shadow rose, well pleased. With all hope of liberty for the Shadow Witch destroyed, she saw her way to power. "I will be your willing messenger," she said. She turned away and followed by the piercing glances of the Imps, she left the Cave Hall, and a little later again passed by the guards at the Cave Mouth and came into the open country without.

There she glanced about her, hoping to catch sight of those whom she sought. She did not look in vain, for almost immediately the giant, Curling Smoke, uncurled his tall form from a deep chasm

in the cliff close by and towered high above her, blocking the way.

"Whither do you go, Black Shadow?" demanded he haughtily. "You cannot pass until you answer."

"I have no wish to pass, for it is yourself whom I seek," she returned.

"What is it that you desire?" he asked ungraciously, for he was no friend to the Shadow Witch and made naught of her servants.

"I bring a message from the Wizard of the Cave," replied she. "He desires your assistance. Because of an ill turn that she served him, he holds his sister prisoner, and Creeping Shadow, knowing that it would be vain to ask any of the powerful ones in our own land to rescue her, journeyed to the Land of Fire to ask aid of Prince Radiance."

At the very mention of Prince Radi-

ance, whom he hated, Curling Smoke twisted himself about in a violent rage. "Let him not dare to return here, lest I make short work of him!" he shouted hoarsely. "Let him not flatter himself that he can escape me this time as he did before."

"It is not Prince Radiance who comes, but another; that one, so Creeping Shadow tells me, who alone is fated to set the Shadow Witch free. Prince Ember is his name, and even now he is close by, in the house of the Elf of the Borderland, there to receive from him, doubtless, something which will aid him to deliver my mistress, and make him proof against any who assail him, or who may seek to prevent his success."

Curling Smoke laughed loud and disdainfully. "What has the Elf to give that could avail against me and my

magic?" he exclaimed. "You amuse me, Black Shadow. Go to that weakling, the Ash Goblin, with such tales, if you will, but do not bring them to Curling Smoke."

"I repeat only what has been told me," returned Black Shadow. "Whether or not it is true, I know not. I have come to you for one thing only—to obtain a promise for the Wizard that you will engage yourself against this prince, wherever you may encounter him."

Again Curling Smoke laughed, and his huge shape swayed boastfully from side to side. "You have little need to doubt my answer," he replied. "Do I not hate these strangers from the Land of Fire with all my heart? Am I not only too eager for an excuse to do them harm? Return, then, to the Wizard, and say to him that he need have no fear that this

prince will escape me. Say to him that Curling Smoke—greatest of all magicians, promises that it shall not be."

This said, Curling Smoke settled again into a cleft from whence he could watch the entire Plain of Ash. No one could approach him from thence without being seen by him.

Black Shadow assured of the vigilance of this powerful ally, departed at once to seek the Ash Goblin, whose low mean hovel stood at some distance away among the ash mounds of the plain.

So despised is the Ash Goblin that few ever seek his door, and when he heard upon it the sharp knock of Black Shadow, he started with surprise. He crept across the dingy floor, and put his bulging eye to the keyhole to peer through, and discover who stood without. His astonishment at seeing Black

Shadow was great, for never had she sought him out before, but he knew that he had no reason to fear her, so he opened to her at once.

She came in, and without waiting to be invited sank down into a seat. The Ash Goblin made fast the door, and as he did so he turned his crafty head to her and inquired her errand. She told him all.

"Well may you come to me," he assured her. "I have long desired to revenge myself upon your impudent mistress. Often she has made sport of me with her tricking shadows. Often she has even dared to make my own form flicker and dance before me—not as it is—indeed, but twisted and misshapen to please her own mischievous fancy." His eyes glinted with malice, and Black Shadow was well pleased to find him so willing to give his help.

"Then I will count upon you," she said rising. "As I have told you, the Prince is now in the Elf's house. If you are wise, you will go and hide yourself near it, and seize your chance to attack him as soon as he leaves its shelter."

"The Wizard need have no fear," retorted the Ash Goblin. "I will surely not miss so good an opportunity to avenge myself upon his sister."

This ally also having been gained, Black Shadow bade him farewell, and went to the Wind in the Chimney.

Wide is the Chimney Mouth, which gives entrance to the Wind's dwelling, for a giant must come and go through it. This entrance is dark, and yawning, and perilous, and none dares enter it except at the Wind's will.

The voice of the Wind is loud when he laughs in glee, but it is louder a thou-

sandfold when he howls with rage, and when he sweeps down from his high seat in the Chimney and rushes out into the lands beyond, whistling or shrieking as he goes, he drives all before him, whether they will or no.

Today the Wind rested in his home, on the great rough bench which was his favorite seat, and Black Shadow had but to ask of the Breezes who loitered about the Chimney Mouth whether she might go into the Wind's presence, to have her request granted immediately. Seldom did she trust herself to such boisterous company, but the occasion was urgent. So she entered, though not without some uneasiness, and went on and up the rough uneven way, till she reached the huge cranny in the Chimney where the Wind sat, humming a whining song to

himself, as he lounged against the Chimney wall.

He gave her no courteous greeting when she stood before him, but stretched his mighty arm and shoved her unceremoniously into a seat not far from himself. "What do you come to ask of me? Out with it quickly," he growled, with some impatience, for Black Shadow had not dared to speak at once, but sat in silence for a moment considering how best to deliver the message of the Wizard so that it might meet with favor.

Thus commanded, however, she delayed no longer and presently had told her story to the end.

The Wind heard her with unconcealed pleasure. "Ho, ho!" he howled, puffing his round cheeks till they seemed like to burst. "We shall have great sport with this bold prince when he ventures

forth from the Elf's dwelling. He shall nowhere be safe from me, for I am the Wind in the Chimney, and nothing stops or stays me in what I set out to do. Prince Ember has no magic that will be proof against me, and so far as anything that the Elf can do for him goes, I scorn it." So confident was he that he laughed till the Chimney shook and rattled, and the soot that lined its walls fell thick over the head and shoulders of his guest.

Hearing their master's uproarious laughter, the Breezes came stealing in to discover its cause, but the Wind frowned upon them and buffeted them to right and left so sternly that they rushed quickly out again without daring to speak.

The Wind turned to Black Shadow. "Go back to the Wizard," he commanded her gruffly. "Tell him that the

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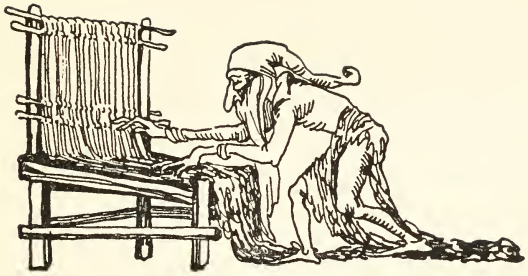
Chimney shall fall in ruins, and the Wind himself become as the faintest of his Breezes before this stranger prince succeeds in his purpose of setting free the Shadow Witch."

He shook his mantle, he tossed his great shaggy head and whistled loudly. "I am the Wind—the Wind in the Chimney! Heugh, heugh! Ho, ho! Heugh, heugh!"

Pursued by his braggart whistlings and the hoarse echoings of his mirth, Black Shadow left him and hurried back to the Wizard's Cave to make known to him the success of her mission.



CHAPTER VII

WHEN Prince Ember said farewell to Creeping Shadow and stepped into the Elf's house, he found himself in a curious room whose walls were grey with ash, whose floor was covered so thick with it, that his feet sank into it, and made no sound. It was as if he trod on softest down.

In the middle of the room stood the Elf, with pudgy hand extended. "Welcome, good Prince," he said heartily. "You come on the business of the

Shadow Witch, for I know the knock of her servant, Creeping Shadow. What is it that you desire?"

"I am on my way to deliver the Shadow Witch," the Prince made answer, taking his hand. "The Wise One has bade me ask of you a certain marvelous Cloak of Ash, to conceal me from my enemies. He says that here only is the secret of its making known, and that you will not refuse to provide me with it."

"The Wise One has spoken truly," returned the Elf, " but he has doubtless told you also that you must wait while this Cloak is woven especially for you."

"That he has," replied Prince Ember. "But let it be done quickly, I beg of you, for who can tell what the Shadow Witch may suffer at the hands of her brother if my coming be long delayed."

"Not a moment shall be lost," the Elf assured him. Still holding him by the hand, he drew him to a narrow door at the farther end of the room. He opened it, and revealed beyond it the Prince saw a vast chamber, filled with elves hurrying silently to and fro on tasks strange to him. The moment their master entered with Prince Ember, every elf stood still ready to hear and obey whatever command might be given to them.

"Where is the Weaver of the Cloak?" inquired the Elf. "There is work for him to do."

Instantly a very ancient elf separated himself from his companions, and came to stand before the Elf of the Borderland. "I am ready, master," he said.

"The Cloak is to be for this Prince," the Elf told him. "Use your best skill in the weaving, so that it may be potent

against his enemies, for much depends upon it."

"It will not fail him, master," responded the Weaver confidently. His keen old eyes swept the Prince from head to foot. He needed to take no other measure. Then he turned to a dim loom beside the wall, and standing before it, he began to spread the fairy warp under the watchful eye of the Elf. As he did so the elves came hurrying noiselessly with the magic ash which was to fill it.

Deftly the Weaver began to weave, crooning the mystic weaving-song meanwhile, so that the magic of its words might sink into every part of the Cloak, and make its power certain. He feared not to weave it under the eyes of him who should receive it, for he knew well that he who wears the Cloak, may see it woven, and hear the song, but no

sooner has the Cloak fallen upon his shoulders than he forgets what his eyes had beheld and his ears heard. Thus the secret of the ancient Weaver remains with the elves of the Borderland.

Steadily the Cloak of Ash grew under the skilful hands of the Weaver, steadily the Prince watched the shuttle come and go. Never once did the ancient Weaver rest; never once did he cease to sing his mystic song, nor did the elves pause as they came and went, bringing the magic ash for the Cloak's fashioning.

At last the moment came when the Weaver's shuttle stopped, the song ceased and the elves stood still. The Elf turned to the Prince. "The Cloak is finished," he said.

He bent down and lifted it soft and

silvery from the loom, and Prince Ember stretched eager hands to receive it.

"Give heed to my words," the Elf admonished him, as he delivered it to him. "In the Cave of Darkness only will you be endangered by the spells of the Wizard himself. There only he has power, and he never leaves its shelter and the weapons of enchantment which it contains. But in the lands without he has powerful and evil friends, who will not be slow to help him against his enemies if he desires it. From all but one of these the Cloak will conceal you."

The Elf paused for a moment and then went on more earnestly. "Though your foes will not behold you, yet you must be on your guard against them, for who can say what traps they may set for you, what snares may await you. Beware, therefore, of the Ash Goblin He is

Prince Ember stretched eager hands to receive it.

small of stature, but he cannot safely be despised, for he is very cunning. He will not only assist the Wizard gladly because he hates his sister, but for some grudge, also, that he bears to the dwellers in the Land of Fire, he will not fail to wreak his spite on any who comes from thence."

"I will not forget your warning," Prince Ember promised him.

"Beware, also, of Curling Smoke," the Elf continued. "None more wicked and dreadful than he inhabits the lands you must pass through. He travels far and wide, and because Prince Radiance lately conquered and scattered him by the power of his Sword of Flames, he has vowed to be revenged upon one and all who enter here from the land of the good Fire Fairies."

Again Prince Ember assured him that he would remember.

The Elf drew closer to him and laid his hand upon the Prince's arm. "Beware," he adjured him solemnly, "Beware of the Wind in the Chimney. Against him only the Cloak may not protect you. His eyes are keen to pierce disguises. His hands are strong to break down spells. See to it that he does not snatch from you in an unguarded moment this sheltering Cloak."

Once more the Prince gave his promise, and stretching his hands in gratitude to the giver of so priceless a treasure, poured out his thanks.

But the Elf checked him. "Speak not of it," he protested kindly. "The elves of the Borderland rejoice to have a part in any noble undertaking. Only succeed, and we are well repaid."

"The Wise One has said that I shall be victorious," declared the Prince confidently. "And when my task is done, and the Shadow Witch has returned in freedom to her own land, I shall preserve as my chief treasure this marvelous Cloak, which you have been at such pains to weave for me."

The Elf smiled and shook his head. "Not so," he answered. "None takes the Cloak of Ash from the Borderland."

"Then I will return it safe to your hands," the Prince assured him.

"There will be no need," replied the Elf, "for the Cloak perishes when its work is done."

With these words he led him from the dim room where the marvel had been wrought, and brought him to the outer threshold of his house. There the Prince bade him farewell.

"Good fortune go with you," responded the friendly Elf in a cautious undertone. "Put on the Cloak now, and go forth."

In obedience to his words, Prince Ember threw the Cloak about him and fastened it securely. As its soft and delicate folds enveloped him, the Cloak became invisible at the same time that the Prince himself became fully concealed by it.

He lifted the latch and opened the door and passed silently out into the Borderland.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Ash Goblin was filled with pride. To have his assistance asked by so powerful a magician as the Wizard of the Cave was something that had never before occurred. Although he was small and weak, he was always desirous of having a part in any mischief that might be going on, and now that his chance had come he was determined to prove to all those who had hitherto despised him and overlooked him, that his cunning and skill in evil magic were fully equal to their own.

Scarcely had the door of his hovel closed upon Black Shadow than he locked it securely. Then he hurried across the room and pressed upon a certain spot in the wall. It yielded to his touch, and a portion of the wall slid back upon itself, showing a small, rude cupboard within. Upon a shelf there lay a book, covered with dust. It was his Book of Craft. He took it out and carried it to a table. He undid the rough clasp that bound the book and began to turn the dingy pages. At length, he reached the one whereon the spell that he sought was written. The letters were crabbed and dim with age, and the Ash Goblin strained his eyes to see them, following the words with his crooked forefinger. He read the spell through carefully, again and again, until he was certain that he knew it by heart. Then he closed

the book and returned it to its hiding-place. He made the wall fast again, and went to the chest that held his pouch and cloak. Taking them out, he carried the pouch to the hearth and filled it to the brim with the evil ash that lay thick there. He bound the pouch about his waist, covered himself from head to foot with the cloak and left the hovel, closing the door tightly, so that none could enter in his absence.

The Plain of Ash stretches wide and grey between the hovel of the Ash Goblin and the Borderland where the Elf dwells. In the Borderland itself no evil fairy can practice his craft, but the Ash Goblin knew a spot where the Plain meets the Borderland, which all must cross in passing from the Elf's house to the Wizard's Cave, or from the Cave to the Land of Shadows. At this spot he

purposed to set a cunning snare for Prince Ember.

Across the great Plain he scuttled in haste. So like to the ashes about him was he in color that only those who knew him well would have been able to see him at all. He held his head down, and his hood was pulled low over his forehead, but though his face was carefully concealed, his sharp eyes peered out, searching the Plain to see if the Prince were anywhere about. But there was no sign of him, and being satisfied that he was still within the Elf's dwelling, the Ash Goblin went rapidly to the spot which he had chosen, with eyes fixed upon the door through which the Prince must come.

He had not quite reached the place, when suddenly he saw the Elf's door opening slowly. Vexed that he had not

arrived in time, but knowing how great a risk he should run if he were seen by the Prince before the snare was set, he dropped down quickly beside a hillock of ash, where he could see without being seen. There he would lie hidden until Prince Ember had gone by on his way to the Cave. After that he knew he could make ready his snare at his leisure, sure in his heart that if the Prince were so fortunate as to escape the Wizard, he could not fail to be entrapped by the snare, when, as he must on his homeward journey, he passed that way again.

But to his great surprise, although the door opened wide, it remained so for a moment only, and then closed again silently without his having seen anyone come out of it. Afraid to venture forth immediately, he watched for a little longer, but the door remained shut, and

finally the Ash Goblin came out from his hiding-place and began to set his snare, still keeping a watchful eye over the Elf's house as he did so.

As a matter of fact, however, when the Elf's door had stood open, Prince Ember had passed out of it, and concealed by the Cloak of Ash, had proceeded on his way to the Wizard's Cave. The Ash Goblin, on his own part, had been so well hidden by the mound of ash where he had crouched down, that the Prince had passed close by him without having perceived him.

So while the Ash Goblin worked busily upon his snare, Prince Ember traversed the Plain of Ash, keeping always in view that black cliff toward which Creeping Shadow had pointed before she had left him. Even from a distance it looked forbidding, yet the bold

spirit of the Prince did not quail at the thought of the unknown dangers that awaited him there. Straight forward he went over the long stretches of ash, past high mounds and low grey hillocks, and through shallow vales. As he journeyed he remembered the Elf's warning, and would not have been surprised if he had been set upon at any moment by any of the foes that had been mentioned to him. But a deep silence filled the Plain, and nowhere did he see anything that could molest him. Never had the Prince believed that there could be a land so empty and so lonely.

He arrived at the foot of the cliff and began to mount the steep path that led to the Cave's mouth. Up and up he went, still on his guard, but still seeing no foe and hearing no sound. Now on this side, now on that, deep and dark

crevices yawned, but his feet went surely and safely on.

In one of these same crevices, Curling Smoke lay hidden, peering out with watchful eyes across the grey expanse, to catch the first glimpse of the ruddy stranger of whom Black Shadow had told him, yet under his very eyes the Prince was traveling and he saw him not.

At length Prince Ember reached the entrance to the Wizard's Cave. Standing there, he looked first across the Plain and then into the gloom of the cavern, but no enemy was in sight. Quickly he removed the Cloak of Ash and then, as fairy raiment always may when fairy fingers press it, it became as small as a kerchief in his hand. He thrust it to a place of safety in his belt.

If Curling Smoke had but leaned a little farther out at that moment from the

dark hollow in the cliff-side where he lay, he must surely have seen him, but crouching low, so that he might not be seen by the one for whom he watched, he saw nothing and did not guess that the Prince was actually within reach of his giant arms.

So, guarded from all his enemies, Prince Ember passed into the Cave of Darkness, not knowing how well the Elf's good gift had already served him.

CHAPTER IX

CLOSE to the mouth of the Cave of Darkness, but cleverly hidden from the view of any passerby, sat a company of Imps. They had been commanded to keep ceaseless watch at that point for the stranger Prince who was expected soon to appear, and they were instructed to seize him as soon as he attempted to enter the Cave and to bring him bound to their master.

The time had been long, and they were now yawning for very weariness, yet

they dared not relax their vigilance, knowing, as they did, that they would be severely punished by the Wizard if they allowed the Prince to slip by them unobserved.

At last one of the Imps arose and stretched himself, for his limbs were cramped and stiff. "I go to spy out over the Plain," he said. "I shall be absent but a moment."

His companions nodded indifferently, and he strolled slowly toward the entrance of the cavern. All at once, he stopped, transfixed with surprise, for at the Cave Mouth he saw for a single instant a richly glowing figure standing, one who could be no other than the stranger Prince, he for whom they waited. Scarcely had he seen it, however, than it disappeared.

He rushed back to his fellows. "The

Prince is here!" he whispered hoarsely. "I saw him at the Cave Mouth. To be sure he has vanished, but I know he is close by." . .

The Imps started to their feet, and stood ready, the ropes of darkness with which they were to bind the Prince clutched firmly in their hands. But no one appeared, and when they searched the Cave Mouth, they did so in vain.

Presently they began to scoff at their companion. "Your eyes are wearied with long watching," they told him. "They have played you false. Come not to us with such idle tales."

"Nay, but I saw him," the Imp insisted. "Without doubt this Prince has the power to make himself invisible. Even now he may have slipped past us unseen. If this be so, and I fail to tell

the Wizard what I saw, I shall surely be punished. I go to warn him."

The others shrugged their shoulders. "Go if you choose," they said. "For our own part, we think it not impossible that he lurks in some near-by hiding-place, from whence he steals forth at times, watching his opportunity to slip in unobserved. He saw you, and has retreated to it. We will keep close watch as before. He will return, and then we will secure him. If, on the other hand, he has power to make himself invisible, and passes us unseen, we are not to blame."

Even as they spoke thus, Prince Ember stood near them, listening to their words. It was as the first Imp had suspected. On passing into the Cave of Darkness, he had, by his own power of enchantment, made himself invisible,

and having overheard the watchers talking together, he had paused, so that the Imp who had seen him might go before him and without being aware of it, would guide him directly to the Wizard.

The Imp did not stop to argue longer with his companions, but snatched up a lantern, and sped off at once, and close behind him went the unseen Prince. As they went onward, Prince Ember saw opening to either side of them many hushed and gloomy passageways, down which, without his guide, he might easily have strayed, but by his unexpected good fortune, and far sooner than, at the beginning of his journey, he had dared to hope, he came suddenly into the great Cave Hall. Its grim walls rose high on all sides, close hung with their swaying curtains of soot. The glistening frag-

ments of charcoal that covered its floor, lay like a thick carpet beneath the feet.

In the centre of the vast room stood the Wizard, quite alone. Forbidding enough in himself, clad as he was in long black robes, over which his dingy beard fell from his grim face almost to his feet, he seemed yet more so because of the huge black urns that were ranged about him in a circle. The sides of the urns were covered with curious inscriptions, and only the Wizard knew by these signs what deadly mists and vapors were confined under their ponderous lids.

On a table at his side his case of evil wands stood open, and as he needed the one or the other for his enchantments, he lifted it out and waved it over the urn which he chose, muttering strange words meanwhile in an unknown tongue. His Book of Craft, also, lay open before him,

so that he might diligently consult it before the working of each new spell. At this moment he was bending above it, wand in hand, reading intently.

Even in his zeal to disclose to his master what had happened at the entrance to the cavern, the Imp dared not tread within that circle of enchantment. He cast himself upon his knees without it, bowed low his head, and cried aloud, "Sir Wizard, oh, Sir Wizard! Harken!"

Interrupted in such unexpected fashion while he was in the midst of his wicked task, the Wizard turned abruptly and bent upon his servant a glance of dark displeasure. "How dare you disturb me in the working of my spells?" he thundered. "Have I not strictly forbidden any to tread within this Hall during the Hour of Enchantments?"

"Alas, that I should have ventured to

disobey you, my master!" stammered the Imp with trembling voice. He knew well the punishment that waited on disobedience, yet he feared far more what might be meted out to him if he should withhold that which he had come to say. "Only the news I bring," he continued humbly, "could have made me disobey your commands."

The Wizard perceived that this was a matter of real importance. He laid down his wand, therefore, and prepared to listen. "What is it that you have come to tell?" he demanded.

Encouraged thus, the Imp began. "As I stood near the Cave Mouth, I had a sudden vision of a stranger in ruddy garments. He stood at the entrance for an instant only, but plain to be seen against the light, and then vanished, I know not whither. It may be that my

eyes deceived me, for when we made diligent search we could find no trace, but it may be, also, that he has made himself invisible, and is even now among us. Lest it might be this stranger Prince, perchance, for whom you bade us watch, I have left my companions on guard as before, while I came to tell you what I believe that I beheld. I dared not do otherwise."

"You have done wisely," commended the Wizard. "Without doubt it is the Prince of whom Black Shadow has told me, for she said that we may know him by his ruddy garments. Whether or not he has made himself invisible, he shall not escape me. If he is here, I shall surely find him out. Rise now, and return to your watch with the rest."

Silently the Imp arose and obeyed. Prince Ember standing but a little dis-

tance from the mystic urns, heard his swift footfalls echo down the corridor.

The Wizard stood for a moment wrapped in thought, but presently he laid down the wand which he held in his hand and chose another from the case. He raised it aloft and waved it in a great circle above his head. "By the power of this wand," he exclaimed, "I bid any who stand invisible within this Cave Hall to become visible at once."

As he heard the words, Prince Ember's heart stood still. He knew not the power of the Wizard's wand, nor whether his own magic would surely be proof against it. But his own spell held firm, and he remained invisible.

So certain was the Wizard of the potency of his wand, that he smiled grimly and confidently when he saw none appear. Leaving the circle of his urns, he

stepped to the entrance to the corridor, and drew his wand across it. "Let none pass this threshold unseen," he cried in a loud voice.

Satisfied that he now had made all secure, he returned, Prince Ember watching him meanwhile. He took his place amid the urns and replaced his wand in the box with its fellows. He dropped the lid and turned the key. He closed and locked his Book of Craft, also.

Then he smote his hands together sharply and, at the signal, the Chief Imp came rushing to learn his desire.

"Take away these urns," the Wizard commanded, "and place my wands and book in safe-keeping."

The Chief Imp raised the Book of Craft from the table and bearing it carefully in his outstretched hands, disappeared with it from the Hall. A moment

later he returned and carried away the box of wands in the same manner. With him came many Imps, who laid hands upon the ponderous urns and with heavy rumblings rolled them slowly away out of the Cave Hall.

In the meanwhile Prince Ember stood still watchful beside the wall, waiting for some clue which would guide him to where the Shadow Witch lay imprisoned, for he knew well that without this he must surely go astray. He had not long to wait, for when presently the Imps came flocking back to the Cave Hall, as they were always free to do when the Hour of Enchantment was done, the Wizard gave a sign to his lantern-bearers.

"I go to visit my sister, the Shadow Witch," he said.

Immediately they snatched up their lights and stood ready.

The Wizard crossed to the farther end of the Cave Hall and touched the wall with his wand. Prince Ember saw the wall part instantly in twain, revealing the dim corridor beyond it.

The Imps plunged quickly into it holding aloft their flickering lanterns that gave out but a feeble light in the gloom. The Wizard strode after them, and at his very side stole the Prince, overjoyed at this sudden and unexpected opportunity.

The Wizard paused and touched the wall again, and it closed soundlessly behind them. Then they went forward.

Deep and yet deeper, into the very heart of the Cave they penetrated, following its dark and winding ways. The Prince observed each turn closely, so

that when he should return bringing with him the Shadow Witch, he might find his way out without error.

At length they reached the wall that barred her dungeon, and the Wizard struck upon it as he had the other. It yawned apart in its turn, and with such impetuous zeal did Prince Ember hasten toward the opening that he entered before the rest the sombre prison that lay within.

In the first moment he saw nothing, but as the Imps pressed into the room and ranged themselves along the walls, he was enabled, by the light of their glimmering lanterns to descry a dim bowed figure seated there.

It was the Shadow Witch. Her face was buried in her delicate hands. Her long black hair hung loose over her drooped shoulders and grey garments,

and fell in masses upon the ground. Plunged as she was in deep despair, even the opening of the wall had failed as yet to make her sensible of the coming of her brother and his servants.

Beholding her thus, Prince Ember was stirred to deepest pity, and his heart burned to speak some instant word of comfort. With a powerful effort he restrained himself, for to betray his presence to the Wizard now would be to encounter he knew not what evil power, to endanger his chance of delivering her whom he had come to save.

That which so moved the heart of the Prince to compassion, awoke only malicious delight in the Wizard's breast.

"Ah, my sister," he said mockingly, drawing near to her, "I find you less confident today than when we last met. Hope fades I see."

His voice aroused her. She lifted her head and raised herself slowly to her feet, and as she turned herself toward the Wizard, Prince Ember beheld her face for the first time.

He looked upon its wondrous beauty, he saw upon it the marks of the pain that she had endured, he gazed into the splendor of her great dark eyes, and love for her rose within him like a flood, a love so warm, so strong, that he knew instantly, and for a certainty, that in her he had found his true Princess, she whom he could not choose but love with his whole heart. Thrilled with joy because of it, he waited for her voice.

Silvery calm it fell upon his ear as she answered the Wizard. "Though hope may seem to fade for a moment, brother, it rises fast and soon, for there is that

within my breast that tells me that you cannot always hold me thus."

She would have given much had the Wizard not found her sunken in despair, but since he had done so, she was determined that he should not guess how deep that despair had been.

The Wizard smiled contemptuously at her words, and added taunt to taunt. "It tells you, perchance, of that Prince, then, who lingers near the Cave Mouth, seeking entrance, in the belief, no doubt, that he can succeed in snatching you from this prison, and from my power. But let him not deceive himself. My guards are many and watchful—my friends without are strong and clever. He will never be able to escape all of these, try how he may."

The Shadow Witch started violently at such unexpected words. The help that

she had yearned for had come! Prince Radiance, to whom she had been so true a friend, had not forsaken her in her need! That hope, of which she had boasted, and which had so nearly faded from her heart, sprang again to fulness of life. She threw up her arms in uncontrollable rejoicing, and her voice rang sweet and high and clear as she exclaimed: "Ah, he has come at last, the good Prince Radiance! He has not failed me! Think not that your guards can stay him. Think not that your evil friends are able to destroy him. He has conquered them once—he will conquer again. Already you yourself have felt his mystic power. You shall feel it once more, my brother, when he returns. I have done well to hope!"

"Nay, not so fast," the Wizard flung at her scornfully. "He who comes is not

Prince Radiance, but some stranger prince. One who owes you no friendship, whose power is untested, who has no cause to brave great dangers for your sake—grey woman that you are. From the perils that he must meet he will soon turn back, if indeed he live to do so."

Undismayed, undiscouraged, the Shadow Witch bent her dark eyes upon him. "What matter that he is a stranger?" she cried confidently. "They who come from that bright land count themselves no strangers to the weak and the defenceless. They have, too, their own noble magic, before which ours is powerless. In a moment when you think not it will be upon you, and its spell will overcome you. This prince is my friend! I know it well! The hour of my deliverance is at hand!"

Loud rang the laughter of the Wizard.

Harsh and vibrant it filled all the room and echoed back from the gloomy walls. "Think you I would tell you of this prince, did I not know that he cannot reach you? Far hid from him are you, my sister," he triumphed, "so deep within this Cave, and behind such walls as he can never penetrate, whatever be his magic. The secret that unlocks your dungeon lies with me only, and with those to whom I choose to entrust it. The spell that holds it fast is the all-potent spell of the Wizard of the Cave."

Proudly and boastfully he spoke, but all that he might say had no power to dim the hope and confidence of his sister. She deigned him no reply, but by her bearing he knew that she feared him not at all.

"When I come again," he jeered at her, "I will bring you further news of

this good prince, and how his adventure fares. It will give you food for thought, perchance, as you sit here in your darkness."

"It will indeed sustain me, brother," she replied.

Prince Ember, near to her, though unseen, listening to her dauntless words, loved her yet more for her high courage and for her sorrowful beauty.

Still smiling scornfully, the Wizard turned away. The Imps knowing that he was now ready to depart, raised their lanterns. Their master touched the wall. It opened wide, and in an instant master and slaves were gone, and the walls met silently and grimly together behind them. Beyond its barrier their retreating footsteps grew fainter and yet fainter until soon they could no longer be heard.

Alone, as she believed herself now to

be, in the imprisoning darkness, the Shadow Witch let fall her head and sighed deeply. "Ah, that the time may not be long," she murmured. "Ah, that this prince might hasten his coming, for I am very weary, even though I hope."

Then from the darkness near her came a voice. "Princess of the Shadows," it breathed, "I, Prince Ember am here."

At the words her heart leapt within her breast. She raised her head quickly, thinking to pierce the blackness that surrounded her and behold the one who spoke. As she did so the gloom melted, and in its place a soft warm glow flooded all her prison. By its rich light she saw before her a glorious figure, clad all in deepest rose—Prince Ember, freed from his dark disguise. The radiant brightness of his ruddy garments made warmth and light about him. His eyes, ardent

and glowing, were bent upon her, filled with a tenderness of sympathy and compassion, with a fulness of love, that struck to her soul. His hands were stretched to her, his spirit drew her.

A cry of wonder broke from the lips of the Shadow Witch. With her large eyes fixed upon him, sorrow fled from her face, and in its stead came joy where joy had never dwelt before. How had he come to her? she asked herself, to her in this dark prison? How had he pierced the thickness of those cruel walls? Why should his eyes rest with love upon her, the grey Shadow Witch? And yet it was true—he was here, this glorious prince —come to save her!

Her face dropped suddenly to her quivering hands, lest it should betray to him too plainly how her heart went out to him, in love and gratitude. Radiance,

She saw before her a glorious figure, Prince Ember.

that first bright prince, had awaked her to keenest longings for a nobler life, a truer magic. But he who stood before her now gave this, and more—gave love, brought happiness.

The Prince came nearer till he was close beside her, and as he did so, her cheek, till now so pale, flushed to a crimson glory against the dusky splendor of her hair. Gently he drew away her shielding hands and looked into her lovely face, bright as none but he had ever seen it. Gently he raised her drooping head and looked into the sweetness of her eyes. "Dear Shadow Witch," he whispered tenderly, "come, ah, come with me, and leave behind forever the darkness of this evil place."

Low was her voice and soft as she made answer: "Happy, thrice happy am I, Prince Ember, that I may leave it with you."

CHAPTER X

WHEN the Wizard parted from his sister, he believed that she was hopelessly in his power, but as he proceeded on his way, he began to recall to himself how defiantly she had borne herself at the last, and with what confidence she had spoken. He remembered, too, how often she had baffled and eluded him before he had imprisoned her, and he knew that it was not entirely impossible that she might do so again. Could

she but release herself from the deep darkness that surrounded her, all her own magic would return to her, and then, in spite of all his guards, she might be able by means of one of her clever tricks, to make her way to liberty.

Thinking of these things, he reached a bend in the corridor where two ways met. The one went directly on to the Cave Hall, but the other led away into that remote and dangerous part of the cavern where lay the Pit of Fumes. Thither he was wont to go to practice his most secret arts. No Imps ever dared to tread that way, for it was well known that none but himself could pass over it in safety.

He paused, for he suddenly bethought himself of how easily he could, by a stroke of enchantment, close with a wall the way to the Cave Hall and leave only that

one open which led to the Pit of Fumes. Then if by some strange means his sister should contrive to escape from her dungeon, she would unsuspectingly go on to the Pit of Fumes. This she would be unable to pass, and would, therefore, be forced to return to the prison that she had left.

The Wizard laughed aloud, for the thought pleased him well. He determined to prepare this trap for her at once. Abruptly he bade the Imps to rest their lanterns. They did so and stood motionless with eyes fixed on their master. The Wizard bent on them his sternest gaze. "Let none dare to look upon that which I am about to do," he commanded.

Immediately his slaves fell upon their knees, and with eyes fast shut and heads bowed to the dust, meekly awaited his pleasure. It was as if they held their

very breath, so deep was the silence of the Cave.

From beneath his cloak the Wizard drew his jet black wand. He waved it toward the walls and repeated, in a voice so low that none but himself could hear them, strange words of enchantment. Under their spell, the Cave walls began to draw slowly together, and before long they stood firmly closed across the way by whence he had come.

Replacing his wand, the Wizard turned to where his servants still knelt with guarded eyes. "Arise, and go forward," he commanded them.

With one accord they sprang to their feet, and without one glance behind to discover what their master had done, they went rapidly ahead of him.

While the Wizard departed in content, Prince Ember made ready to open

the dungeon of the Shadow Witch so that she might go free. With her at his side he stood before the thick wall that barred the way to the corridor. He laid his hand upon his fairy sword, and unsheathed it. It glowed and burned with living fire.

With its bright point he touched the wall in that selfsame place where the Wizard was wont to pass through, and on its blackness he traced the scarlet outline of a door.

Breathlessly the Shadow Witch followed with her eyes the moving point of fire, followed it till the outline was complete, and the sword fell back into its sheath. Without a word, but with swiftly beating heart, she waited in her place by Prince Ember's side to see what wondrous thing that sword could do.

Wondrous indeed, for silently and of

itself the door swung open, and the corridor that led to freedom was before her.

Prince Ember took her hand, and together they crossed the threshold, but when they had passed it he paused, and spoke one charmed word. As silently as it had opened, the door closed behind them at its creator's command, and its outlines vanished, leaving the wall the grim unbroken barrier that it had been before.

"Ah, my good Prince!" whispered the Shadow Witch looking upon it. "What magic is yours!"

He spoke no word in answer, but raised her hand to his lips and kissed it.

Then they began their journey along the windings of the corridor, that stretched away and away into a gloom that seemed to have no end. Yet the place where they trod was bright about

them, made so by the ruddy glow which streamed from the figure of Prince Ember. In the warmth and cheer of it the Shadow Witch glided happily, and as they left her prison farther and farther behind, she became more and more her former self, and again felt stirring to life within her that old-time power of magic of which she had been so long deprived.

They came at length to the wall which the Wizard had set to mislead his sister. Seeing nothing to arouse their suspicions, they went straight on. After traveling for some distance, however, Prince Ember all at once became aware that it was not the way over which he had gone with the Wizard and his servants. He stopped, and began to look sharply about him. On every hand it was unfamiliar to him.

The Shadow Witch saw that he was

troubled, but she could not guess the reason. "What is it?" she asked anxiously.

"When we left the prison," he answered, "we took the way by which I had come to you. There was no other. But now it is not the same."

"There has been no place where we could have turned aside," she assured him. "Nowhere has there appeared any other way open to us."

"And yet we have gone astray," the Prince insisted. "There can be no doubt of it. All that I see now, I have never seen before."

"You are sure of it?" asked his companion.

"I am sure of it."

The eyes of the Shadow Witch flashed with sudden understanding. "It is the enchantment of my brother," she de-

clared. "Lest, perhaps, I should escape him, he has closed the true way, and left this open as a trap for me. Be sure that it leads not to the Cave Hall, except through dangers into which he believes that I will not dare to venture."

"Be these dangers what they may," replied Prince Ember, "I will, by my good magic, overcome them all. And now, since there is no way but this, let us go upon it without tarrying."

"Indeed, we cannot choose but take it," agreed the Shadow Witch.

They resumed their journey, therefore, and now, though the way behind them had been gloomy, that which stretched before them grew more and more so; yet the darker it became about them, the brighter was the glow that streamed from Prince Ember, and the

more surely was the Shadow Witch sustained and cheered thereby.

After a while, they saw that they were approaching an open space, which was wrapped in thick darkness. Beyond it their eyes could not penetrate, but in its midst they beheld shapes like wreaths of vapor arising from below.

The Shadow Witch turned pale, and caught Prince Ember by the arm to draw him back. "Go no farther!" she cried in warning. "Go no farther, I beg of you! Yonder is certain destruction for us both! It is the Pit of Fumes! Those dread and yellow mists carry poison in their breath!"

"Though that be so, yet I must conquer them, for behind us lies your prison," the Prince replied to her. "To it we must not return."

"Never shall you risk such danger for

my sake," the Shadow Witch answered firmly. "Better an endless prison for me than such dreadful peril for you. I speak of what I know—none but my brother has ever dared to enter yonder place. You shall not go."

"And when this place is passed," demanded the Prince, "what lies beyond?"

"What matters it what lies beyond, when destruction lies between?" she murmured sadly. "Were the way ever so open when the Pit is passed, it is closed to us who stand upon this side."

"What lies beyond?" demanded he again. "Answer me truly, for I must know."

Then the Shadow Witch knew that she must tell him. She covered her face with her hands, and her tears fell fast. For a moment she could not speak.

Prince Ember dried her tears with a

tender hand. "What lies beyond?" he insisted gently.

The Shadow Witch clung to him desperately. "The way to the Cave Hall," she admitted. "But, oh, I cannot let you venture where the Pit lies. No, no! Many times have I heard my brother boast to his neighbors that none but himself can draw nigh to it."

"Listen, dear Shadow Witch," said the Prince consolingly, "yonder is a place of terror, in very truth, yet we shall pass it safely, in spite of that. There is good magic which can put to naught even this evil Pit of your brother's. Look—I will show you."

He thrust his hand into his breast, and took out a small round box which was hidden there. "This is the gift of him who is oldest and wisest in all the Kingdom of the Fire," he told her. "When

he gave it, he assured me that when the dangers of the way were greatest, when the way itself seemed closed beyond all hope, that this which my box contains will conquer the danger and make the road to safety plain."

Opening the box he took out the piece of charcoal that lay within.

"Stay you here," he bade her, "until I have prepared the way."

But she was not willing that he should go without her. "Whatever comes, we meet it side by side," she declared.

Nothing that he could say would persuade her to do otherwise, and so at last he consented, but as they drew nearer to the Pit, the noisome odor of its fumes swept toward her and overcame her. Her face grew pale, and she began to sink to the ground.

The Prince knew, that in spite of her

courage, she could endure no more. He led her back a little way, and forced her gently to rest upon a jutting of the wall. There he left her, weak and trembling, to await his return.

Stronger arose the breath of the Pit, and yet more deadly grew its fumes as the Prince drew near it, but he was undismayed. Straight toward the yellow mists he went, and in his hand was the gift of the Wise One. Presently, he reached that point where he himself dared go no farther. The choking vapors floated round him, but the Pit itself, yawning wide and terrible, was still some distance from where he stood. Now he must trust to the strength of his arm, to the sureness of his aim. He drew himself to his full height; he threw back his arm, and hurled the magic charcoal straight to its mark. "Descend into this

Pit!" he cried, as it left his hand. "Descend, and make this evil place to exhale no more!"

Like an arrow it sped. Into the very heart of the Pit it fell, and then were the Wise One's words fulfilled. Like surly slaves, obeying unwillingly, the yellow mists sank back into the Pit, lower and lower, till they were seen no more, and with them went their noisome breath, leaving the air pure and clean. As they vanished, the way which led out of this hollow chamber to the corridor beyond lay plainly visible along the very edge of the Pit.

Prince Ember was about to go and fetch the Shadow Witch from where he had left her, but he had no need. She had felt her strength come flooding back to her when the mists departed, and immediately she rose and came to him.

"Why should I ever fear, when you are with me?" she whispered to him. "How can I ever fail to trust your power to conquer and to save?"

Away from the now vanquished Pit of Fumes they hurried, along a corridor as dusky and deserted as the first had been. Before they had gone far upon it, they heard the low murmuring of voices, and soon they found themselves at the entrance to a low and vaulted chamber, dark like all the rest, but set about with dim lanterns and peopled with many Imps, busy at strange tasks.

Some stood before dingy looms, weaving huge curtains of soot, to replace those which covered the walls in the Cave Hall, when they should become worn, and drop to pieces. Others sat upon blocks of charcoal and braided ropes of darkness to bind those who dis-

obeyed the Wizard's will and though they knew that they themselves might at any time be bound by them, they durst not make them less strong than their master ordained that they should be.

Over them stood the Chief Imp, whose business it was to see that none failed in his duty, or gossiped unduly with his neighbors, and so deeply engaged in their several tasks were one and all, that none heard the sound of approaching footsteps, none knew that any but themselves were near, till quite by accident the Chief Imp raised his head and saw within the doorway of the chamber the ruddy form of Prince Ember standing, and by his side the grey Shadow Witch, whom all had believed to be closely guarded by the walls of her distant prison.

Before the Chief Imp could give a

command, before any other could cry out, or attempt evil, the Prince had drawn forth a wand from beneath his mantle and raised it. Clear and strong his voice fell on their ears, saying, "Stir not from your places, nor speak, until the hour when the feet of the Shadow Witch stand once more within the safe borders of her own land."

Under Prince Ember's spell each servant of the Wizard became fixed in his place, unable to move or to utter a syllable. With staring eyes they beheld the Prince and his companion advance, and pass through their very midst, whilst they remained powerless to so much as stretch out a hand to clutch at their garments.

In their rebellious ears the words of his enchantment were still ringing as he departed with the Shadow Witch from their sight.

CHAPTER XI

PRINCE EMBER and the Shadow Witch were now rapidly approaching the Cave Hall. On their way they passed other vaulted chambers, like the one they had just left, and glancing into these as they hastened by, they saw great urns with ponderous lids, and enormous chests, all marked with the signs of the Wizard, filled, as the Shadow Witch was well aware, with those evil things with which he worked his spells, but not an Imp was anywhere to be seen.

She glided cautiously to the door of one of these rooms and peeped in. She

found, as she had supposed, that it was the bedchamber of her brother. His huge bed, with its jet black coverings and pillows stood ready to receive him; his tall chair was set close beside it. Near by was his special treasure chest, in which his choicest wands and spell-books were locked carefully away from prying fingers, but this room was as silent and deserted as all the rest.

On a sudden they heard loud rapping, which became still louder, and then a harsh voice crying out in angry tones, again and yet again.

"It is my brother calling for his Imps," whispered the Shadow Witch. "He is not used to have them tarry when he summons them."

It was as she said: the Wizard, in the Cave Hall, was grey with rage. Never before had he called to his servants with-

out their scurrying on nimble feet to learn his desires, but this time he had struck repeatedly upon the arm of his chair, and had lifted his voice louder and louder, yet neither the Chief Imp nor any other came. He knew where and how they should be employed at this time, and if they were doing their duty, they were within sound of his voice. How they could dare not to answer him, how they could be deaf when he summoned them, the Wizard could not understand.

The Shadow Witch stole closer to Prince Ember, and spoke beneath her breath. "The Wizard is but a few yards from us," she said. "A moment more, and we must encounter him. I do not fear him now, for in this part of the Cave my power has always been fully equal to his own. The truth is, I have more than once defeated him here. He remem-

bers it well. Yet—I was long bound by that dark prison—long subject to his power. Before I return to the Land of Shadows, I must test myself, for I wish to be certain that I can still meet and defy him in his Cave Hall without being conquered by him; but in order to make sure of myself I must go before him quite alone."

Prince Ember shook his head. "I would not have you venture it," he objected. "The risk is too great."

"Not when you are near me," she told him confidently. "If the moment should come when I know that I am unable to resist him longer, I will call to you, and you will hasten to my help."

Reluctantly the Prince consented, and she glided away from him with soundless footsteps. Close, close behind her he followed till they reached the threshold

of the Cave Hall. There he tarried out of sight, yet where his eyes could still keep guard over her.

The Wizard, provoked beyond measure by the inattention of his servants, was about to rise from his chair to go and learn the reason, and to punish them, when suddenly a low-toned laugh struck on his ears. It startled him, for it was the familiar laughter of his sister—his sister, whom he believed to be far away, hopelessly imprisoned in the deepest recesses of his cavern. He turned his head in the direction from whence it came, and as he half rose from his seat, puzzled and uncertain, it echoed a second time through the Cave. It came from close by, in that dusky corridor that led to his own bedchamber, led to the rooms beyond where the Imps were busy, ay—and led on still further to his Pit of

Fumes. By that way his sister could not pass. He smiled cruelly as he thought of that inconquerable barrier to her coming. By the other way there was the double wall, sealed by his enchantment. Remembering these things he was certain that he but imagined that he had heard her echoing laugh.

Even as he said this, he heard it again, and stealing toward him from out the corridor came a grey figure, laughing as she came. He gazed at it in wonder. It could not really be the Shadow Witch, he told himself. It must be that his eyes were deceiving him.

Impossible as it seemed, however, he presently saw that it was she who stood before him, knew that it was her own voice that rang clear and triumphant in his ears.

"The dungeon in which you thought

to hold me was not strong enough when that day came of which I warned you, brother," she declared. "By a power stronger than yours I have escaped, and I am here in proof that you have failed. In this place, as you well know, you can do naught against me."

The Wizard's eyes flashed fire. He made a step forward with hands outstretched to seize her. "Do not boast too soon," retorted he. "I have yet a spell to conquer you even here."

Although the Shadow Witch held her head high in defiance of him, she retreated a few paces. It was true, as she had said, that she was not afraid, but she did not mean to be without caution. She would make her test quickly. If she could but baffle him once more with that old trick of hers, that thus far had never

failed to confound him, she would know that she was safe against him.

She waved her grey sleeves, and instantly there fell between her and the Wizard her magic curtain, her moving curtain of shadow. Before it stood a shadow image, so like to herself that it deceived even the keen eyes of the Wizard. Behind the curtain she herself was perfectly concealed.

It was done so quickly, so skilfully, that the Wizard did not guess what had happened. He snatched at the image but when he had almost grasped it, it withdrew from him swiftly. When he pursued it, it darted now to this side, now to that, with marvelous agility, always seeming just within reach of his fingers, yet always just eluding them as they began to close upon it, and each time he

failed he heard the laughter that so mocked him.

A triumphant smile stole over the face of the Shadow Witch, for she saw plainly that she was still able to defend herself against him. Knowing how easily she could escape now from the Cave Hall with Prince Ember, she was about to beckon to him, but she was too late, for in that moment the Wizard snatched more swiftly than he had yet done at the gliding figure before the curtain, and this time not in vain. His hands closed upon it, indeed, but closed on nothingness, and thus he learned that he had once more been cheated by his sister's art.

Filled with wrath, he shouted words of enchantment, in a voice loud and compelling, and in answer to them dense darkness descended swiftly over all the

Cave Hall, making it as black as the prison from whence the Shadow Witch had escaped. That which she had not believed that he could do here, he had done. Before the darkness her shadow curtain dissolved, and she herself, crying aloud, sank down helpess to the Cave floor.

Now at last the Wizard was certain that she was utterly in his power, was certain that there was none near to hear or answer the sharp cry for help which she had given when she fell. He bent down through the gloom to seize her, but as he did so, the darkness broke and fled, and in its place a rich warm light came flooding through the Cave Hall. It shone upon the evil face of the Wizard stooping there; it made plain the form of the Shadow Witch where she lay.

Startled by this strange light, the Wiz-

ard threw back his head to discover from whence it came, and beheld in the doorway the figure of Prince Ember, standing with the Sword of Fire upraised.

It was from the Sword that this ruddy glow streamed forth, and as the Prince advanced rapidy into the Cave Hall, the light grew more intense, so that the Wizard could not bear to look upon its beauty, nor could he bear the strong pure heat that flowed from the Sword as it drew nearer and more near.

Anguish seized him, and a weakness greater even than he had felt before the Sword of Flames in the hands of Prince Radiance. He gave a hoarse cry to his servants for help, but they, voiceless and motionless prisoners in their vaulted chamber, could not answer, could not come to him, although they heard him call.

He tried to struggle to his feet, but it was quite in vain. Instead he fell prone upon the ground. As he lay there, he saw his sister rise from where his evil spell had cast her, saw her grow strong again, saw joy and courage beam in her face. Her eyes were lifted to this stranger, come to succor her with the glowing light and warmth of his conquering Sword. By all these things he knew that the Prince, of whom Black Shadow had warned him, had come at last.

Prince Ember stretched above his prostrate form the fiery Sword. "Cruel and wicked master of the Cave," he cried, " here shall you lie in bondage to this Sword until the hour when your sister stands safely within her own borders. Cry not to your servants yonder. They, too, are bound by my spell and

cannot answer. Cry not to your guardians of the Cave Mouth. They also shall be enchained."

Deep into the frame of the Wizard the magic of the Sword pierced its way. He saw, as in a vision, the Prince put back his Sword. With dulling eyes, he beheld his sister take the hand which the stranger tenderly extended to her. He perceived them go together from the Cave Hall, and into that corridor that led to freedom.

Then all sense and thought forsook him. The spell of the Sword of Fire had so penetrated his inmost being that he no longer was aware that beyond the Cave lurked Curling Smoke and the Ash Goblin, and that farther away the Wind in the Chimney waited, all pledged to destroy Prince Ember, and to prevent the escape of the Shadow Witch.

Meanwhile the two pursued their way to the Cave's mouth. At its entrance those Imps who had been sent to guard it still kept vigilant watch. None had ventured to sleep or to stir from his post, for though the time had been long, and no one had tried to pass them, they dared not be unfaithful to their trust. They feared the Wizard's wrath and the punishment that would surely befall them, if anything should go amiss through fault of theirs.

But as Prince Ember and the Shadow Witch approached them, a strange and unfamiliar warmth stole over the watchers, benumbing all their senses. Drowsiness came down upon them where they stood or sat, and with one accord they began to nod, to sink off to sleep, and presently they were wrapped in a slum-

ber so profound that nothing could possibly break it.

This, too, was the spell of the Sword of Fire.

As the Shadow Witch passed the Imps and saw them sleeping there, some leaning upright against the rough wall of the cavern, some with heads bowed on knees, and others lying prostrate on the ground, she turned her head to her companion, with a smile.

"Vain are my brother's guards," she murmured, "when Prince Ember comes."

CHAPTER XII

REJOICING in the freedom which she now felt was fully restored to her, the Shadow Witch glided from the Cave of Darkness and was about to descend the cliff, but Prince Ember laid a gentle hand upon her, to draw her back. "Dear Lady of the Shadows," he said in an undertone, "we must not go unprotected into the open. It may be that unseen enemies are lurking there, who at least have power to hinder us, even if they cannot harm us. I have in my possession a magic Cloak, which will make us invisible to our enemies, and enable us to go securely and swiftly on our way.

Let us put it on." So saying, he drew her still closer to him, and took from his belt the Cloak of Ash and cast it about them both.

She thanked him sweetly for his constant care of her, and side by side they went down the cliff.

But though they were now unseen, they had stood for a moment before the Cave entrance, fully revealed, and in that moment the eyes of an enemy had caught sight of them.

Long had Curling Smoke crouched low in his cranny in the cliff-side. His gaze had roved unceasingly over the Plain of Ash. So vigilant was he that he was sure that none could possibly have approached the Wizard's Cave without being seen by him from his hiding-place. Nevertheless, hour had dragged slowly

after hour, and still the one for whom he waited did not appear.

The giant's eyeballs ached, and grew dim at length from his steadfast watching. Had it not been for his keen desire to satisfy his own ancient grudge against the good fairies of the Fire, he would have broken his promise to the Wizard, and careless as to whether or not the Prince went by, he would have lain down to rest.

He wondered greatly at the delay, for, long since, Black Shadow had told him that the stranger was already within the Elf's dwelling in the Borderland. If this were true, he should have reached the Cave by now. Curling Smoke could not imagine what this important matter could be which could detain the Prince so long, yet in spite of his weariness, he

continued to look away in the direction of the Elf's house.

Growing more and more restless and impatient, he finally rose a little in his place of concealment and thrust out his head far enough to see not only the expanse of the Plain and the path up the cliff-side, but the entrance to the Cave of Darkness as well. What was his astonishment to see two figures standing before it—one of them the grey-robed Shadow Witch, whom he knew well, the other a stranger, and clad in those ruddy garments by which Black Shadow had declared he might recognize Prince Ember. He could scarcely believe it to be possible that the Shadow Witch had escaped from her brother—that the Prince had crossed the Plain under his very eyes unseen. Yet there they were, almost in his grasp. Eager to snatch at them both,

he was about to emerge from his hiding-place, when, to his discomfiture, they both vanished suddenly from his sight.

That they had gone back into the cavern he did not believe to be possible. Moreover their faces had been set toward the Plain. There could be no doubt that they had made themselves invisible, and were now on their way down the cliff.

Unseen though they were, he knew how he could entrap them, and hold them in his power. Determined to do this, he wound his form stealthily upward, and from his right hand he cast forth huge plumes and columns of smoke, which began to overspread the sky, and traveling swiftly, came on and on as his hand directed them, until they hung poised far above the heads of the

unsuspecting Prince and his companion.

From his left hand long wreaths and streamers of smoke went out across the ground, creeping along fast and silently, veiling it so that none could see where his own feet trod.

Closer and closer from behind these, great smoke walls drew in, but the faces of the two were set steadily toward the Land of Shadows, and they knew naught of the danger which was so rapidly overtaking them.

Then, suddenly, by the enchanter's power, a smoke wall, dense and impenetrable, fell from above directly before the travelers, setting a barrier between them and the land to which they were bound. All at once they found themselves in a vast chamber, hemmed in on every hand by the encompassing smoke.

The Shadow Witch was first to awaken to their peril. Casting her eyes downward by chance, she all at once became aware of a faint veil of smoke that was creeping round about her feet. Well did she know by that sign who was near. She cast her eyes hurriedly on all sides, and saw with alarm that the smoke was drawing in upon them from every quarter.

She caught Prince Ember's arm, whispering anxiously, "Behold, my Prince, behold the smoke fog! This is the work of the powerful magician, Curling Smoke. We are entrapped." At that same moment the smoke dropped down in front of them, making complete the walls of the vast chamber in which they stood imprisoned.

Prince Ember, beholding, was motionless with dismay. Flashing back to

his mind came the warning of his good friend the Elf. "Beware of Curling Smoke," he had said. "None more wicked and dreadful than he inhabits the lands through which you must pass."

How or when the giant had discovered the presence of himself and the Shadow Witch, the Prince could not guess, unless it had been in that one unguarded moment before the Cave, but now he was upon them with his enchantments, and he might be able to overpower them both, armed though they were with the Cloak of Ash and the Sword of Fire. In spite of his great courage, Prince Ember's heart sank low in his breast before this fresh danger to his beloved Shadow Witch. Thinking intently of how best to act against this new foe, he stood silent.

Again the Shadow Witch whispered

low: "See! Yonder from out the fog he comes, with his veils trailing from his arm—the Veil that Chokes—the Veil that Blinds! He has discovered us, and means to destroy us!"

Prince Ember cast his arm about her and pressed her dear head protectingly to his breast. Spurred on by his love for her his courage mounted high. Looking to where she directed his gaze, he, too, saw, looming out of the murky clouds, a great shape, fierce and terrible —the giant, Curling Smoke.

From his huge arms hung the veils of which the Shadow Witch had spoken, held always ready to use against any who provoked his wrath. He stood still, at some distance from them, and searched the dim spaces about him with piercing eyes, but seemed not to find the ones he sought.

"He does not see us, dearest," spoke the Prince, under his breath. "The Cloak conceals us, as the Elf promised that it would."

"True," answered the Shadow Witch, "but before we escape this giant we must do battle with him. I know well his ways, and I doubt not that he has joined himself to my brother for our destruction."

"I have a weapon which has not yet failed me," the Prince assured her bravely. "With it I will meet him, and by using it valiantly shall hope to overcome him and deliver you." He was about to draw the Sword of Fire, but the Shadow Witch prevented him.

"Not yet, not yet," she besought him. "Fully do I trust the marvelous power of your Sword, and it will be potent here, I doubt not, if the moment of its using be

right, but I have heard that Curling Smoke cannot be vanquished in his smoke chamber until he towers within it to his fullest height. This I believe I have the power to make him do, and when he has done so, I am sure you will not strike in vain. Till then let your Sword rest quiet in its sheath, but keep your hand upon its hilt, and when I give the word, draw it at once and strike quickly."

"It shall be as you say," the Prince promised her, looking into her uplifted face with tender love.

While they had said these things, Curling Smoke had remained where he was, waiting, as if in the hope that he might make visible, by his mere gazing, those whom he had entrapped. Presently they heard his voice crying aloud through the fog, "Let those beware who defy Curl-

ing Smoke. Though they be invisible, they shall yet feel his power."

Beneath the Cloak of Ash, the Shadow Witch raised her grey sleeves and waved them toward Curling Smoke. Prince Ember, watching to see what she was about to do, saw a creature, as if in answer to the giant's cry, take shape from among the smoke wreaths that lay along the ground and begin to creep, half hidden by them, toward the giant.

Curling Smoke suddenly beheld it also, beheld it with curiosity and astonishment, for this was neither the Prince nor the Shadow Witch, both of whom he believed to be bound by his enchantment, but a stranger. How he had entered the smoke chamber, he did not know. Remaining, poised watchfully where he was, he kept his glittering eyes upon it, till it should draw nearer.

Before it reached him it began to rise, to grow larger as it rose, and he presently saw that it was a giant like himself, though smaller and less terrible. His head was bent and his face hidden.

Curling Smoke gazed upon the newcomer with indignation. "Who are you, who dare to venture unasked within the bounds that I have set?" he demanded imperiously.

The stranger made no answer, but ceasing to mount, stood poised directly in front of him, with his face still concealed.

"Know you not that I am the Master Magician and have power to destroy you instantly?" shouted Curling Smoke, lifting his huge hand in menace.

Still the creature did not reply.

Instantly Curling Smoke unloosed his terrible Veil that Chokes, and flung it at

him. It smote against the drooped head of the unknown, but instead of suffocating him, as Curling Smoke had intended that it should, it floated harmlessly back again and hung itself about the enchanter's arm.

Foiled though he had been in his first attempt, Curling Smoke was not discomfited. He shook free his Veil that Blinds. "This—this shall overcome you," he cried boastfully. "Now shall you learn how great is the power of the Magician of Veils." With skilful hands he so wielded it, that it struck full in the eyes of the intruder, even though his head was still bent low. Yet in spite of this, the second veil drifted back defeated to its place beside the Veil that Chokes.

Wrathful and puzzled because his veils had proved themselves thus power-

less against this silent and seemingly defenceless stranger, Curling Smoke thrust out his powerful arms to wind his adversary round and crush him, but the stranger melted from his coils, and stood beyond his grasp unharmed as before.

Then he began again to mount. He reached the magician's shoulders, and shooting yet higher threw back his head.

Curling Smoke, looking upon him, saw to his amazement the face of Prince Ember; a giant now in size, and grey-robed, but still Prince Ember. What had become of the Shadow Witch, by what magic the Prince had become thus transformed, the magician could not guess, nor did he care, provided he but succeeded in conquering this hated visitant from the Land of Fire.

He regarded him in silence for a moment, pondering how he should accom-

plish it. Here was his match in size; here was one against whom his veils were powerless; here, too, was a creature who melted from his grasp when he thought to seize and twist him. What, then, remained for him to do? This only: to overtop him and smother him by casting himself down upon him from above.

Immediately he began to send himself upward in rapidly rising spirals, so that he might throw himself down upon the stranger with the greater force, but as he mounted, the other ascended also, faster and faster, higher and higher, always head and shoulders above Curling Smoke.

As Curling Smoke rose, he shouted threats and defiance, shaking his fist at his rival and glaring up at him with malicious and baneful eyes. But the other

still maintained his strange silence and met his look unmoved.

Prince Ember watching this phantom of himself from the shelter of the Cloak of Ash, marvelled at the power of the Shadow Witch who, by her magic, could so delude their foe. As he watched, he held himself in readiness to draw his sword when his companion gave the word.

Still higher towered the phantom Prince, and after him sprang Curling Smoke, wreathing his murky spirals upward, and crying out more and more boisterously as he grew the more enraged by every vain effort to reach and overleap him.

The two had almost reached the dome, and Prince Ember's hand tightened on his Sword, for he felt that the time to use it was near.

"Not yet, my Prince," whispered the Shadow Witch. "Not yet."

An arm's length higher she sent her phantom, and made him pause. Seeing this, sure now that his enemy could go no further, Curling Smoke shot up with lightning swiftness and stood above him at last, stretched to his full height, an immensely tall and straight and slender column, poised on tiptoe to spring and overleap him. His voice rang out hoarsely. "Ah, now you shall not escape me! At last your time has come!"

"Strike!" breathed the Shadow Witch to the waiting Prince. "Strike now!"

Swiftly Prince Ember threw back the Cloak of Ash. The Sword of Fire glowed red as it swung through the air, and redder still as it struck the limbs of Curling Smoke and clove them. As the strange heat of that fairy Sword rushed

through his giant frame, Curling Smoke became as naught. His limbs were seized with faintness and trembling. The phantom Prince vanished suddenly from before him, and his own Veil that Blinds rose in darkening folds across his eyes. The Veil that Chokes swept across his mouth, and his turbulent voice was stilled. He began to shrink upward, to waver and fade, and presently he drifted helplessly into the great smoke dome and was swallowed up in it.

Then, also, before the mighty heat that flowed from the Sword of Fire, the walls and dome of the vast smoke chamber, and the smoke wreaths upon the ground, were themselves dissolved, and Prince Ember and the Shadow Witch stood free in the Plain of Ash.

"Ah, my brave Prince! By your Sword of Fire, how gloriously you have

conquered!" exclaimed the Shadow Witch, with sparkling eyes.

"Forget not the magic of my dear Lady of the Shadows," Prince Ember tenderly reminded her, "for without its aid this victory could scarcely have been won."

The Shadow Witch laughed sweetly. "On, on together, then," she cried.

CHAPTER XIII

WITH the perils of the Cave of Darkness left behind, with Curling Smoke vanquished and driven far off, the Shadow Witch was happy; and in her presence Prince Ember gave no thought for the moment to any further danger that might beset them.

Danger was not far distant. In the spot that he had chosen, the Ash Goblin worked fast and diligently upon the snare with which he meant to entrap Prince Ember, hoping that he might be

able to complete it before the Prince arrived.

He could plainly see the Elf's house from where he labored. He believed the Prince to be still within its walls, and he was sure that none as yet had crossed its threshold. With his twisted hands he took from the long bag hidden beneath his cloak the evil ash, of which alone his snare could be made, and sifted it carefully over the ground. Meanwhile he repeated the words of enchantment written in his Book of Craft, which he believed would make certain the capture of Prince Ember, but he took good care to repeat them silently, lest any, coming upon him unawares, should overhear them and learn his secret. As the ash fell to the ground from his fingers, it spread and ran together to form a thin

and web-like film, leaving no spot uncovered.

So treacherous was this snare, that if one but stepped upon its borders, he would become unable to release his feet from it and would be drawn helplessly to its centre. There the web would rise upon him from all sides with lightning swiftness to enmesh him and draw him down till he was fast bound in its folds, and there he must perish in his vain efforts to escape. This was the trap that the Ash Goblin was cunningly and silently preparing for Prince Ember, keeping watch in the meanwhile for him to approach. He kept himself close to the ground, concealed by the ashes around him, so like they were in color to his dingy robe, and the cap that covered his matted grizzled hair. Occasionally he chuckled to himself at the thought of

the discomfiture which lay in store for Curling Smoke, that boastful giant, whom he believed to be lying in wait for the Prince near to the Wizard's Cave. Such confidence had the Ash Goblin in his snare that never for an instant did he believe that the Prince could escape it and come within reach of the giant's arms.

While he worked and exulted thus, he did not forget that in conquering Prince Ember, he would pay off, also, his old grudge against the Shadow Witch for her mockery of him.

The Shadow Witch, coming across the Plain of Ash with the Prince, safe-sheltered by the Cloak of the good Elf, had been sure that they were now safe from peril, when on a sudden it seemed as if a warning hand were laid upon her.

She stopped and looked around her, but saw nothing.

Then, with piercing eyes, she scanned the Plain in front. At a considerable distance from her, bent over the ash, she espied a figure well-known to her—the Ash Goblin, intent upon some task. She suspected danger, and caught at the Prince's mantle, exclaiming beneath her breath, "The Ash Goblin! See, how stealthily he creeps along! Never does he venture so far from home unless he has evil plans afoot."

Prince Ember had forgotten the Ash Goblin, had forgotten the words of the Elf of the Borderland, but now they returned to him. "Beware of the Ash Goblin! He is small of stature, but he cannot safely be despised, for he is very cunning." He followed the pointing finger of the Shadow Witch, that he

might behold this new enemy, but he strained his eyes in vain.

"I see nothing but the grey Plain that lies between us and the Elf's dwelling," he replied.

She laid her hand lightly upon his eyes for a moment, and by the magic of her touch made his vision more keen. "Look now," she urged, withdrawing her hand, "and you will see."

Prince Ember obeyed, and immediately he, too, beheld the ugly form of the Ash Goblin bending over his snare. "Yes, there he is," he said, "and I remember now how earnestly the Elf of the Borderland bade me be on my guard against his cunning."

"Ah, my Prince," the Shadow Witch responded, "you may well be on your guard. Though he knows the weakness of his body too well to dare to attack an

enemy in fair and open fight, he is powerful in such craft as he can carry out in secret. Whether or not he is preparing a trap for us, I cannot tell. One thing is certain, we cannot choose but pass over the place where he is at work."

"Whatever may lie in wait for us there, my dear Shadow Witch," Prince Ember assured her, "we will meet it unafraid."

They went directly toward their foe. Nowhere did they see anything that spoke of danger until they were but a stone's throw from where the Ash Goblin knelt. There they stood still to scan his work, and beheld a delicate mesh, so thin and fine that it was well-nigh invisible, stretching away to right and left of him and in front of him.

The Shadow Witch, seeing, shrank back aghast. "It is the cunning web of

the Ash Goblin!" she breathed. "None escapes destruction who sets foot within its bounds."

Before the Prince could answer, the Ash Goblin rose. He had put the final touch to his work. The last handful of his ash had been strewn, the last word of his spell had been pronounced, and weary with long bending over his work, he drew himself up slowly.

"A goodly snare, a goodly snare," they heard him mutter to himself. "Never yet has it failed me—no, nor ever shall, so long as I hold the secret of my evil ash, so long as I remember the words of my ancient spell."

He gloated over it for a moment in silence, and then continued: "To this snare the feet of Prince Ember must come. When he treads so much as its border he is lost, and when he is lost, the

impudent Shadow Witch in her dungeon may await her brother's pleasure for her deliverance. Let her learn in good time, that it is the Ash Goblin, the Ash Goblin whom she has so often mocked, who has helped to keep her there." He wagged his head exultantly, and sank down again to conceal himself in the ashes, and there await unseen the coming of the Prince.

The Shadow Witch heard his words, and her cheek grew pale as ivory. She pressed her hands close together and looked into Prince Ember's face, her eyes full of pain. "Alas! my Prince," she whispered, "it grieves me that you should encounter so many perils for my sake! And here—ah, here, I am afraid that all your wondrous fairy power cannot suffice to break this wicked snare that has been set for you."

Prince Ember smiled. "Grieve not so, my Shadow Witch," he consoled her. "There is no danger that I would not meet gladly for your sake. Think not that I cannot here match magic with magic, and conquer, for there is no evil enchantment but must yield before the power of the good fairies of the Fire."

With quiet confidence he left the shelter of the Cloak of Ash, and in his hand was his fairy sword. It shone with a red glory.

The Ash Goblin, crouching upon the ground, keeping his eyes fixed upon the Elf's threshold, had heard no syllable that had been spoken, nor knew that anyone was near.

But now his staring eyes suddenly beheld the place about him suffused with scarlet light. He leapt to his feet, turning in swift amaze to learn from whence

it came, and saw Prince Ember standing, with Sword extended like a bar of fire across his snare. From it streamed that heat, potent and overmastering, wherein its magic dwelt.

"Let the snare of the Ash Goblin perish before the power of the Sword of Fire!" exclaimed the Prince, and as he uttered the words the Ash Goblin saw the web that he had been at such pains to prepare, begin to shrivel and shrink away, and presently it had vanished completely from the surface of the Plain.

A frenzied shriek burst from the Ash Goblin at the sight of his work destroyed before his very eyes and by the one for whom the snare had been laid. Coward though he was, he would have rushed upon the Prince to attack him with all his puny strength, had not the heat

which streamed from the Sword of Fire made his limbs powerless to stir from the spot where he lay hid, had not the glow which surrounded him become so intense that he was forced to bury his head in his cloak, lest his eyes should be blinded by it.

Crouching there, wrapped to the very crown of his head in his dingy cloak, he heard again the voice of Prince Ember.

"Depart quickly," commanded the Prince, "lest you be consumed in like manner as your evil snare."

Then the Ash Goblin rose and fled away in terror from the place where he had hoped to triumph, fled on and on, until he came to the threshold of his own hut. In desperate haste he undid the door, and rushing in, closed and barred it fast, to shut out the spell of the conquering Sword.

CHAPTER XIV

WHILE Prince Ember had passed from place to place, everywhere meeting and conquering the perils that beset him and his companion, the Wind in the Chimney had not been unmindful of his promise to Black Shadow. On the contrary, he was only too willing to help the Wizard.

As soon as the Wizard's messenger had departed from him, he despatched a half dozen of his keenest and most agile Breezes to the Chimney Mouth to spy

upon the Elf's house from thence, and bring him word at once the moment the Prince was seen to cross its threshold.

During the time, therefore, that the Imps had been keeping guard at the entrance to the Wizard's cavern, the Breezes, on their part, had been industriously looking across the Plain from the Chimney Mouth, but with no better fortune in the one case than in the other.

Once, it is true, they, like the Ash Goblin, had espied the Elf's door open slowly and remain so for a moment, and they had waited eagerly for the Prince to come forth, but no one had appeared, and presently the door had closed again and had remained fast shut ever since.

The Wind, sitting on his rough seat in the Chimney, began to chafe at the delay. He did not overlook the fact that the Breezes were merry fellows, and

that, though they took no liberties while they were under his eye, and talked only in whispers among themselves when they perched in the Chimney nooks, they had only to be out of his sight to begin to whisk gaily about and dance and sing in the liveliest possible manner, so as to enjoy their freedom to the utmost.

He began to believe that even on this occasion, in spite of the strictness of his commands, they were amusing themselves after their usual fashion, and, becoming more and more careless and inattentive to their duty, had allowed Prince Ember to go on his way unobserved.

Leaning forward in his seat, he called down to them gruffly, demanding to know whether any sign had yet been seen of the stranger prince. When he received their answer, he was more than

ever convinced of their negligence and gave orders that one of their number should go out and scour the Plain, to discover whether the Prince was anywhere about. But the one who had been sent returned to say that there was nothing to be seen but the yellow fog of Curling Smoke.

The Wind shrugged his great shoulders contemptuously. "The affairs of Curling Smoke do not interest me," he declared.

For a little longer he waited and then began to stir about impatiently upon his Chimney seat.

"Go out and search the Plain more carefully than was done by your fellow," he shouted to another of the Breezes. "It is quite impossible that the Prince should still be in the Elf's house."

Swift to obey his master, the second

Breeze went forth, yet came back in a little while, declaring that he had seen no one but the Ash Goblin, bending over the ground as though intent upon some task.

"Bah!" exclaimed the Wind. "Why do you come to me with such news as that? What difference can it make to me what such a wretched creature as the Ash Goblin is doing? Let him amuse himself with his trifles as he pleases."

Thus rebuffed, his servant retreated shamefacedly to his post, and again the Wind waited.

Such a great length of time had passed since they had taken up their vigil at the Chimney Mouth, that the Breezes themselves were beginning to be uneasy, and to suspect that by means of some enchantment the Prince had actually escaped them.

Then they bethought them of the moment when the Elf's door had been seen to open and shut without anyone coming out of it, and they were troubled, and wondered whether they should, perhaps, have made the matter known to their master at the time.

Finally, one of their number, bolder than the rest, summoned up his courage and went and told the Wind of it.

"What!" shrieked the Wind, rising in a tempest of rage. "Can it be that you saw anything so important as this and brought me no word of it? Magic has been at work! This Prince has without doubt escaped me. Even at this instant he may be upon the Plain under the very eyes of my watchers!"

Hurling the messenger from him, the Wind rushed down to the Chimney Mouth. He buffeted to right and left

the Breezes who stood there, and whirled out upon the Plain to see for himself whether or not what he suspected was true.

It so happened that Prince Ember and the Shadow Witch were crossing the Plain directly in front of the Chimney Mouth at that instant.

Then what the Elf of the Borderland had feared immediately came true. The keen eyes of the Wind pierced the spell of the Weaver elf. His rough blasts shattered it. Snatching the fairy Cloak from the shoulders of the travelers, he beat it quickly back into the loose ashes of which it had been woven, and drove them off and away into the wide spaces of the Borderland, there to settle down at last wherever they would.

Thus were Prince Ember and the

Shadow Witch revealed to the gaze of their most powerful enemy.

The Prince needed none to tell him who this new foe was, nor did he quail at sight of him, though he knew that he might well fear for his companion and himself. Quickly he thrust the Shadow Witch behind him, and with his Sword of Fire in his hand awaited his coming.

With a loud howl the Wind was upon them. Against this terrific onset the Prince held firm, and as the Wind dashed himself upon the Sword, thinking to wrest that from him, also, it leapt to life, a broad and beauteous sheet of scarlet flame, that rose in an ascending barrier high and yet higher at every buffet that it sustained. The more the Wind flung himself upon it in fury, the greater it waxed in power and brilliance,

the stronger the heat that flowed from it in mighty waves.

Cowed by it, the Wind retreated for a moment, but seeing that the flame waned when he did so, he took fresh courage and raged against it once more. Yet quite in vain. Wielding his Sword with steady hand, protected by its wall of leaping fire, its rampart of glowing heat, the Prince met him at every turn dauntless and unharmed.

Still farther back stood the Shadow Witch, her tall form swaying in the blasts of the Wind. At his advance her black hair streamed behind her like a cloud; her grey garments and long grey sleeves, illumined by the red glory of the Sword, billowed round her like floating banners. Through the fierceness of the fight her voice was heard cheering the

Prince sweetly, that his courage might not fail.

So the battle raged: on the one side with unavailing fury, wild shouts, insolent boasting, and slowly wasting strength; on the other hand with steadfast courage, quietness and undimmed confidence.

For long the Wind could not believe it possible that he would be vanquished, but gradually he was convinced that the foe whom he had despised was invincible. Humiliated and sullen, he determined to give up the losing fight. With one last shriek of rage and discomfiture, that rang out to the farthest confines of the Plain and echoed across the Borderland, he fled back in haste to the Chimney, and hurled himself into its depths.

Prince Ember put up his Sword. The Shadow Witch stole to his side to thank him for this new deliverance, but her ex-

ceeding gratitude made her dumb. She could only lay her hands in his, and look into his beloved face in silence.

Knowing what was in her heart, Prince Ember bent to her. "Dear Lady of the Shadows," he said, "to serve you is my highest joy. And now there is no other enemy left for us to dread. I have but to lead you home."

CHAPTER XV

WITH what happiness Prince Ember and the Shadow Witch resumed their journey! All the way before them seemed a way of brightness, though it led across a Plain as grey and desolate as it had been before; but they knew that no perils lay in wait for them, and that every step led them safely on.

While the Shadow Witch talked gaily with the Prince, she turned to him a face as radiant as though a light shone through it from within. Ever and again her laughter rang out low and clear, not

the echoing, mocking laughter, known so well to the evil fairies of that land, but a laugh of rippling music, as if all sweet sounds, all gentle whisperings of the fire were caught up and gathered into it. The Prince listened to it with keen delight. Of all the notes of gladness that he had ever heard, it was to him the loveliest; and she herself, gliding tall and beautiful beside him, he could never tire of gazing upon.

They came at last to the Land of Shadows. Its pale trees and gardens lay before them, and in the distance they saw the Palace of Shadows lifting its grey towers against the sky.

They had spoken less and less frequently as they drew near it, and the laughter of the Shadow Witch had ceased, for her heart had grown heavy, and her mind was filled with troubled

thoughts. Soon Prince Ember would leave her to return to his own home in that fair land which she so much longed to behold. He had left it to come to her deliverance, and at first sight of him she had known that her heart's love could never be given to anyone but him. That he loved her in return, she did not doubt. His eyes had said it, the tones of his voice had revealed it a hundred times. Had he not called her more than once his "dear Shadow Witch," and given himself to danger for her sake again and again?

Yet he said no word of taking her home with him—of making her his bride; and so her eyes were sad, and her heart was full of pain at the thought of the parting which was now so near at hand. She did not dare to speak, lest her grief should break forth uncontrolled.

Who was she, she told herself, the mischievous Shadow Witch, a creature of grey magic, to be the bride of such a one as this bright, this glorious Prince, whose magic was all noble, whose land was all joy and brightness? In her mind she had no picture of that land. She had seen only Prince Radiance and his White Flame and this Prince Ember, yet she could guess from these, its bright inhabitants, how marvelous the Land of Fire must be.

She bowed her head humbly as she thought of it. Its greatest glory, its noblest Prince could never be for her but she was determined that when he had gone from her, she would forsake her own home and would seek the confines at least of the Land of Fire, and there live in a little of its brightness—there learn what she could of its good

magic. This much she must do, for her old life, her old ways, were now more than ever intolerable to her.

Prince Ember, seeing her silent, guessed nothing of her thoughts. To him she was most dear and beautiful, the only one whom he could ever wish to win.

They had reached the foot of her garden, and the Prince stood still. The Shadow Witch paused also, and waited in silence.

Prince Ember took her hand and kissed it. "Lady of the Shadows," he said, "we have come at last to your domain in safety."

The Shadow Witch caught her breath painfully, for she felt that the moment of farewell had come. It was as if she could not bear it.

The Prince drew yet nearer. "Dear

Shadow Witch," he whispered, "I cannot leave you, so do I love you, yet I cannot stay with you here in this grey land. Go with me, then, to my own bright country. Go with we, there to be my bride and princess."

No answering words rose to the lips of the Shadow Witch. Her face was turned away, and her eyes hidden. But a moment since she had been silent because of overmastering sadness. Now, for very joy, she was dumb. In her humility she dared not grasp at once at the happiness held out to her.

The Prince leaned to her in fear, lest he should have been mistaken, lest perhaps she did not love him as he had hoped and believed. "Speak," he besought her. "Ah, speak, my dearest. How can I go without you? How can I leave you in this land—a land too sad

and grey for such a one as you? All the brightness of my own country is without meaning for me henceforth, if I have not you to share it with me as my heart's true love."

Wooed thus, the Shadow Witch hesitated no longer. She turned to him in a flood of love and longing. She stretched her hands to him, trembling with the fulness of her joy, and her voice came again. "Prince of my heart," she murmured softly. "Most dear and glorious Prince, where could my home be ever, if not with you?"

Prince Ember caught her to his heart, and silence fell once more between them.

For a little while they tarried in the borders of the garden, clinging to each other in their first great joy, and the dim alleys and dusky trees took on a brightness till now unknown to them from

these two figures radiant with a pure and innocent love.

At last the Shadow Witch remembered all that she must leave behind. "Listen," she said, and her voice was very gentle, "I have been long gone, and my servants still wait for their mistress. They love me and are faithful. They will mourn for me when I have left them —Creeping Shadow most of all. I must bid them farewell and tell them why it is that I depart from them to return no more."

So they left the confines of the garden and turned their steps toward the Palace of Shadows. They had not yet reached it, when its mistress saw a pale figure approaching through the tall shrubs that lined their way.

It was Creeping Shadow, stealing sadly along the paths once dear to her

mistress, thinking of Prince Ember who had promised succor, a promise which she had begun to fear he had not been able to keep. "Alas! what hope could there be after all?" she thought, "that this Prince should be able, single-handed, to meet and conquer such powerful enemies as the Wizard, and his many evil friends?" She shook her head doubtfully, yet even as she did so she lifted her eyes to look once more along the familiar path by which she had hoped her mistress might return.

"See," exclaimed the Shadow Witch to her lover. "She comes, my good and faithful servant, still seeking, still hoping!"

At that moment Creeping Shadow saw her and gave a loud cry that rang through the spaces and reached even to the palace halls. She rushed to throw

herself at the feet of her mistress, to clasp her knees in an ecstasy of thankfulness and rejoicing. "Mistress, dear mistress!" she exclaimed, "At last, at last, you are here!"

And now from the palace doors and from everywhere, the Shadows came gliding swiftly, to burst into exclamations of joy when they saw, in their turn, who it was that had come.

Among them came the traitor, Black Shadow, hastening to learn whether what she had believed to be impossible, had, in spite of her treachery, been brought to pass. She saw Prince Ember and her mistress surrounded by the welcoming Shadows, saw that her plots had been in vain.

She would have turned at once to flee to the Wizard, to make known to him what had happened, had she not been

arrested by the voice of her mistress speaking strange words, words such as she had never thought to hear.

"I have come to show you that I am set free," said the Shadow Witch, "have come, also, to bid you, my loyal servants, farewell."

A murmur of astonishment went up from the listening Shadows. What could such words mean?

The Shadow Witch continued. "I have found light and joy and true happiness by the side of this good Prince, and I can no longer pass my days in this grey land of mine with its grey magic." She would have spoken further, but a burst of sorrow interrupted her. With one accord her servants swayed mournfully, and with sobs and cries, cast themselves at her feet.

She looked upon them with love and

compassion. What could she do for them, these faithful friends and servants, whom she must leave if she followed her dear Prince? Go she must, but what could she say to comfort them? A thrill of pain went through her heart, tempering her exceeding joy in her new-found happiness.

Prince Ember came to her help. "The light and gladness of the Land of Fire is forbidden to none who are true and faithful," he proclaimed. "Let all, then, who love their mistress, follow her to her new home, if it is their wish."

At these words, so comfort-bringing, the Shadow Witch turned upon her Prince a glance of tenderest gratitude. The Shadows, hearing them, were lifted at once from deep grief to boundless rejoicing. They rose to their feet, their grey robes all a-flutter. "Ah, generous

Prince," they cried, "we follow, follow—happy indeed to be her faithful servants still."

All but Black Shadow. She alone had given no cry of grief, she alone had shown no sign of joy. She had prostrated herself with the rest at the feet of the Shadow Witch, and had bowed her head, but merely to conceal the anger which she felt at the sight of her mistress safe returned. No sound passed her lips now. She was glad to hear of the coming departure, but that gladness, also, she would restrain. Until her mistress had gone, she would keep her own counsel, hide her own purposes, so that she might fulfil them in her own time and in her own way.

She had not long to wait, for Prince Ember's voice, clear and gracious, rose once more. "Let us not tarry. My bright

kingdom awaits its Prince, who has been long absent. Its good fairies will rejoice to welcome not him alone, but his bride and her devoted followers."

So saying he took the hand of the Shadow Witch, and together they left the Garden of Shadows, and set out for the Land of Fire. Behind them trooped the Shadows, eager to behold for themselves that beauteous fairy-land which was henceforth to be their home. But Black Shadow was not among them. As soon as Prince Ember had ceased to speak, she had slipped quietly away.

The Shadow Witch had noticed her absence and presently, turning to see what had become of her, saw a dark figure hurrying toward the Wizard's Cave. It was Black Shadow. A smile of understanding dawned upon the face of the Shadow Witch. She said no word, but

she guessed the treacherous part that her servant had already played, and what she now meant to do. "Let her go her way," she thought. "She can harm us no more."

Meanwhile Prince Ember was thinking of his great debt to the Elf. It was in his mind to stop at his dwelling, as they passed through the Borderland, and thank him for the service which the Cloak of Ash had rendered. But he had no need, for the Elf, espying the travelers from afar, came to meet them. He gave them warm greeting and listened intently while Prince Ember told him all that had befallen them and whither they now were bound.

"Alas, for your marvelous Cloak!" the Prince said regretfully in closing. "When the Wind tore it from me he re-

solved it to ashes and scattered it far and wide."

The Elf smiled. "That does not surprise me. You know that I told you something of what might come to pass. Forget not, however, that the secret of its weaving still dwells with the elves of the Borderland, who will never refuse to provide another if need arises."

He stretched his pudgy hand to the Shadow Witch, who caught it gratefully in both her own. "Ah, good and kind friend!" she cried, "What do I not owe to your faithful friendship!"

"As to that," responded the Elf heartily, looking into her lovely face, "I am already well rewarded by seeing you restored to liberty, and in knowing of the happiness which is to be yours."

Then their farewells were spoken, and

the Elf stood watching them till they vanished from his sight.

In the meantime, Black Shadow had reached the Cave of Darkness, and there she found the Imps still at the entrance. They had awakened and were now rubbing their eyes confusedly and whispering to each other their fears concerning what might have happened while they had slept.

"Little need have you now to guard this Cave mouth," Black Shadow flung at them as she passed. "The Prince, whose entrance it was your duty to prevent, has long since come and gone, taking with him the Shadow Witch."

She did not stay to reply to their frightened and excited questions, but sped straight to the Cave Hall.

There she found the Wizard sitting upright in his chair, though he looked

pale and exhausted. He was surrounded by the Imps who had been imprisoned in the vaulted chamber, and who, when the Shadow Witch had reached her own land and the spell of the Sword of Fire had been lifted, had heard their master's voice calling to them for help. They had come in trembling haste, and found him limp and prostrate on the floor, but with their help, he had at last been enabled to rise slowly and go to his accustomed seat.

"Sir Wizard!" cried Black Shadow, addressing him without ceremony, "the stranger prince has everywhere prevailed! Curling Smoke is scattered! The Ash Goblin is defeated! The Wind in the Chimney has been put to naught! And now, Prince Ember has departed to the Land of Fire, taking with him your sister to make her his bride. With

her went all her servants, the Shadows."

"Let them go," snarled the Wizard, scowling fiercely upon her. "I care not what becomes of them, so that they return no more to trouble me."

"And I," continued Black Shadow, "have come to say that I mean to take your sister's domain for myself, and choose companions to occupy it with me who will obey my commands."

"Do what you will," he retorted impatiently, "so that you, too, go from me, and leave me in peace."

Black Shadow needed no second bidding, but left the Wizard there, with his Imps clustered about him, while she departed in haste to carry out her long cherished plans.

CHAPTER XVI

IN King Red Flame's garden it was brilliant noon-day. The trees waved their branches to a cloudless sky, the flowers lifted their beauteous heads in a clear and golden light. Through the blossoming shrubs, the towers and walls of the Palace of Burning Coals glistened in fullest splendor. Prince Ember and the Shadow Witch approaching, beheld them shining as if in welcome. The band of Shadows caught their breath in wonder at the glorious sight.

Within the palace sat King Red Flame on his jeweled throne, listening to his daughter, the Princess, as she sang the songs he loved. Prince Radiance, close beside her, listened also. He could never tire of that exquisite voice, which, from the first hour that he had heard it, had enchanted his ear, and enchained his heart. The Fire Fairies, busy in palace and garden, paused now and then to catch the floating strains, for their Princess was unspeakably dear to them, and her singing stirred them always to deep delight. Rushing Flame, the King's messenger, poised alertly at the palace gate in readiness to leap forth on any errand for his master, strained his ear, that he, too, might miss no note of her song.

Suddenly, from below the palace windows, the sound of many feet was heard,

and the air was rent by shouts of welcome.

The Princess broke off her song. With one accord the royal company started to their feet, certain that naught but the return of Prince Ember could cause so great a tumult. At that very instant the scarlet figure of Rushing Flame appeared before them, proclaiming, "Your Majesty the King, Prince Ember has returned."

While he was yet speaking, Prince Ember and the Shadow Witch entered the palace hall. Close after them glided the band of Shadows, and accompanying them came the Wise One, kind old Grey Smoke and a multitude of Fire Fairies, who had come quickly together from everywhere, eager to have a part in greeting the unknown guests, and to

hear the adventures of the brave young Prince.

With a lover's pride, Prince Ember led his beloved to the King. Never had the Shadow Witch looked more beautiful. Her ebon hair fell like a rich cloak over her grey robes; her cheek was mantled by a crimson flush; her dark eyes gleamed with a soft radiance.

King Red Flame, won by the first glimpse of this lovely stranger, forgot his state and went to meet her. Without waiting for his nephew to make her known, he drew her to himself in cordial greeting. "Welcome fair Princess of the Shadows," he said, "and welcome, also, to your train." Then to his nephew he turned in deep affection. "Welcome, dear Ember, thrice welcome. Long have we waited and anxiously hoped for your safe return."

"Welcome, welcome," cried Prince Radiance heartily, coming to clasp hands with the Prince and his companion in his turn. Right glad was he to see his good friends once more.

The gentle Princess White Flame, thinking of what she must have endured, took the Shadow Witch to her arms and kissed her as a sister might.

Then did the King demand to know the story of their adventures, and a deep hush fell over the assemblage while Prince Ember related everything, from first to last, that had befallen them. Of all who listened with deep interest and earnest sympathy, only Prince Radiance and Princess White Flame, who themselves had once journeyed in that far-off land and had met its perils, could fully understand how great the task of Prince Ember had been.

The Wise One, hearing how his own gifts and his advice concerning the Elf of the Borderland had been the means of bringing them safely through all the dangers that had threatened them, smiled and nodded his head approvingly, as was his wont.

When, in conclusion, Prince Ember made known that he had won the love of the Shadow Witch, and that she had consented to become his Princess. King Red Flame was greatly pleased that the Prince had found so fair a mate and gave command that the wedding should take place forthwith.

In haste, then, the wedding feast was prepared. Dame Grey Smoke herself saw to it that it lacked no splendor that fairy hands or fairy skill could devise. The Wise One gave sage advice and from his treasure chest brought gifts,

The Prince led his bride home to his Palace of Good Cheer.

ancient and rare. The Fire Fairies vied with one another in their loving task of making all things ready, and among them moved the Shadows, their faces reflecting the joy of their mistress, their hearts filled with wonder and delight at the beauty and goodness of this new fairyland into which they had come to dwell. The Fire Fairies showed them every kindness, so that they might feel at home in a country where all things were strange to them.

So, in the Palace of Burning Coals, Prince Ember and the Shadow Witch were married, and King Red Flame himself gave the bride away.

When the wedding feast with its splendors was ended, the Prince led his bride home to his Palace of Good Cheer.

His own fairies stood to welcome them. On the high golden gate that

overarched the entrance to his dominions three great marriage torches were set, that lifted their quenchless flames upward with pure and golden light.

As Prince Ember advanced with the Shadow Witch through that bright gate, she became transformed, for all grey forsook her trailing robes forever and left them robes of glory, robes of rose and amethyst and richest scarlet in their changing hues. The garments of her attendant Shadows changed, also, and became a soft reflection of the fuller loveliness of her own.

They came on through the shining avenue, amid the welcoming shouts of the Ember Fairies and reached the Palace of Good Cheer. From every turret flaming banners floated, from every window ruddy light beamed out.

At its wide open door Prince Ember

bent and kissed his bride tenderly. "Enter, dear Shadow Witch," he whispered low. "Enter, and crown my life with the priceless treasure of your love."

Her face alight with happiness, she passed in with him. She had come at last, with her beloved Prince, to the fairyland of good magic—to the land of her heart's desire.

CENTRAL CIRCULATION
CHILDREN'S ROOM